

# School Safety Center

*SCHOOL CRIME AND VIOLENCE:*

*CHANGING THE PARADIGM ON SCHOOL VIOLENCE*

**Provided with permission by: In2vate, 2012**

**By Jeff Chasen, J.D.**

The specter of violence haunts the American education system. Littleton now joins in our collective memory with Springfield, Jonesboro, Paducah, and Pearl. Nothing seems to work.

Conventional wisdom suggests that security gates, metal detectors, armed guards, and a crisis team will keep a catastrophe from happening at "my child's school." Yet every few months, a new, violent episode reminds us of the bloody pattern. Nothing seems to work.

Many schools have reacted by beefing up security and technology. Gates, metal detectors, armed guards, and crisis teams are a reaction to problems that have already occurred. All make sense. Yet the killing continues. All of these reactive tools, together, are not enough. Nothing seems to work.

Our young people are growing up in a world where computer technology can duplicate the human brain and medical technology can duplicate the human body. Where is the solution that addresses the fears of students and empathizes with the inner pain of their potential slayers? Is there a better approach?

America's schools can overcome school violence by focusing equal attention on *comprehensive* prevention programs. Comprehensive prevention begins with proper training for teachers and other school staff--on their first day of employment. Prevention begins with student awareness training--on the first day of school. Prevention begins when a school establishes a risk management team to intervene *early* in the lives of troubled students. Prevention is possible.

America's insurance industry has long recognized the value of loss control. The same prevention-based risk management paradigm can help America's schools recognize early warning signs, intervene in the lives of troubled students, and manage the day-to-day issues that sometimes lead to violence. In America's schools, those issues are similar to the workplace--sexual harassment between students, race and sex discrimination between students, drug and alcohol abuse by students, and verbal and physical threats by and between students. All of these issues can be managed through proper awareness and training.

Gates, metal detectors, guards, and crisis teams are legitimate pieces of a complex puzzle. But education and training--from the first day of school--can complete the comprehensive solution our schools so desperately need. With safe hallways and classrooms, teachers will again be empowered to focus on teaching and students will feel secure to focus on learning.

Somewhere, right now, students are being harassed and bullied, and the groundwork is being laid for the next catastrophic incident. Troubled students, unidentified and unchecked, can become productive citizens or the next Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. The choice is ours. Training, awareness, early intervention, and healing can join with gates and guards to provide genuinely comprehensive solutions.

When the American education industry makes this paradigm shift our country and our communities will be able to control the loss of life in America's schools. Healing will replace gates and guards, and the "Three R's" will once again rule in the American classroom.