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# ROOT CAUSES OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE

## CONTEXT, CONCERNS, AND INTERVENTIONS

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CSSI is a research-focused initiative that brings together the nation's best minds to increase the safety of schools nationwide.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this presentation are those of the project Principal Investigators and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Institute of Justice, which has not approved or endorsed its content.




The background of the slide is a photograph of a school building, heavily tinted with a dark blue color. The word "SCHOOL" is visible in large, white, block letters on the upper part of the building's facade. The image shows a set of stairs leading up to a doorway, flanked by columns. There are some trees and bushes in the foreground and background.

Stakeholders want a deeper understanding of the **root causes of school violence** and student problem behavior.

Arcia, 2007; Cook, MacCoun, Muschkin, & Vigdor, 2008; Losen, Hodson, Keith II, Morrison, & Belway, 2015; Malaspina & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008

# School safety: context, concerns, and interventions



Incidents such as the heinous attacks Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, CT, and in other locales (Moses Lake, WA; Pearl, MS; Paducah, KY; Jonesboro, AK; and Littleton, CO) come to the forefront in almost every conversation about school safety and have generated a societal belief that schools are becoming dangerous places.

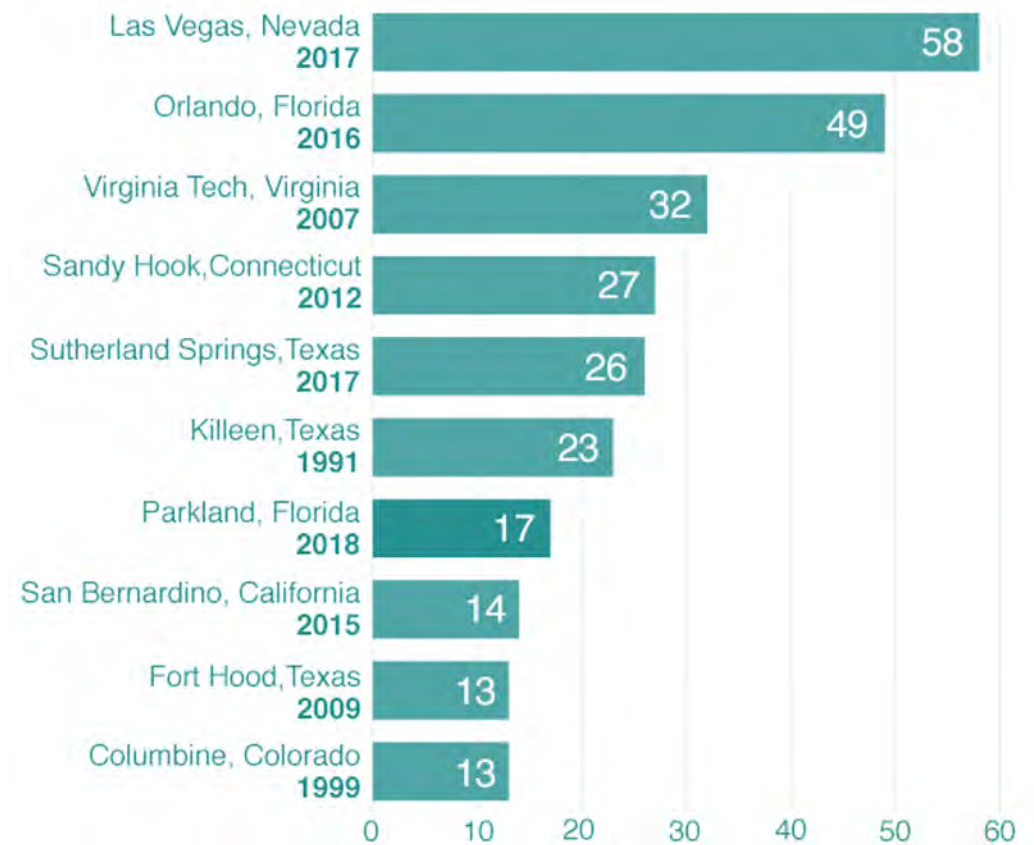
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1999–2017

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## Worst mass shootings in the US since 1991

Victims killed



Source: FBI/Las Vegas police

BBC



In 2018, among 50.8 million K–12 students

Probability of exposure to gunfire at school

1 in 2,500

25,332 incidents

Probability of being killed at school

1 in 1,539,393

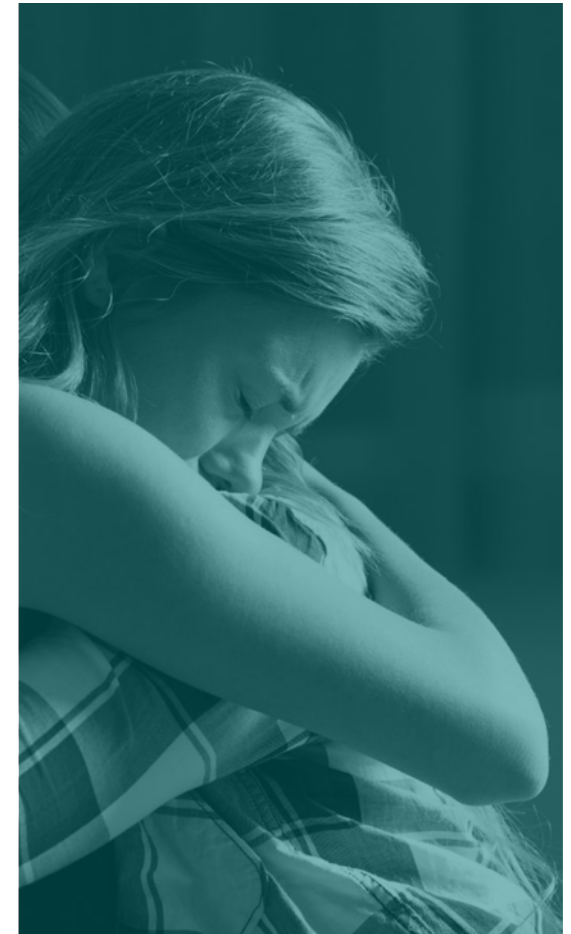
33 incidents



## Probability of Death

1 in

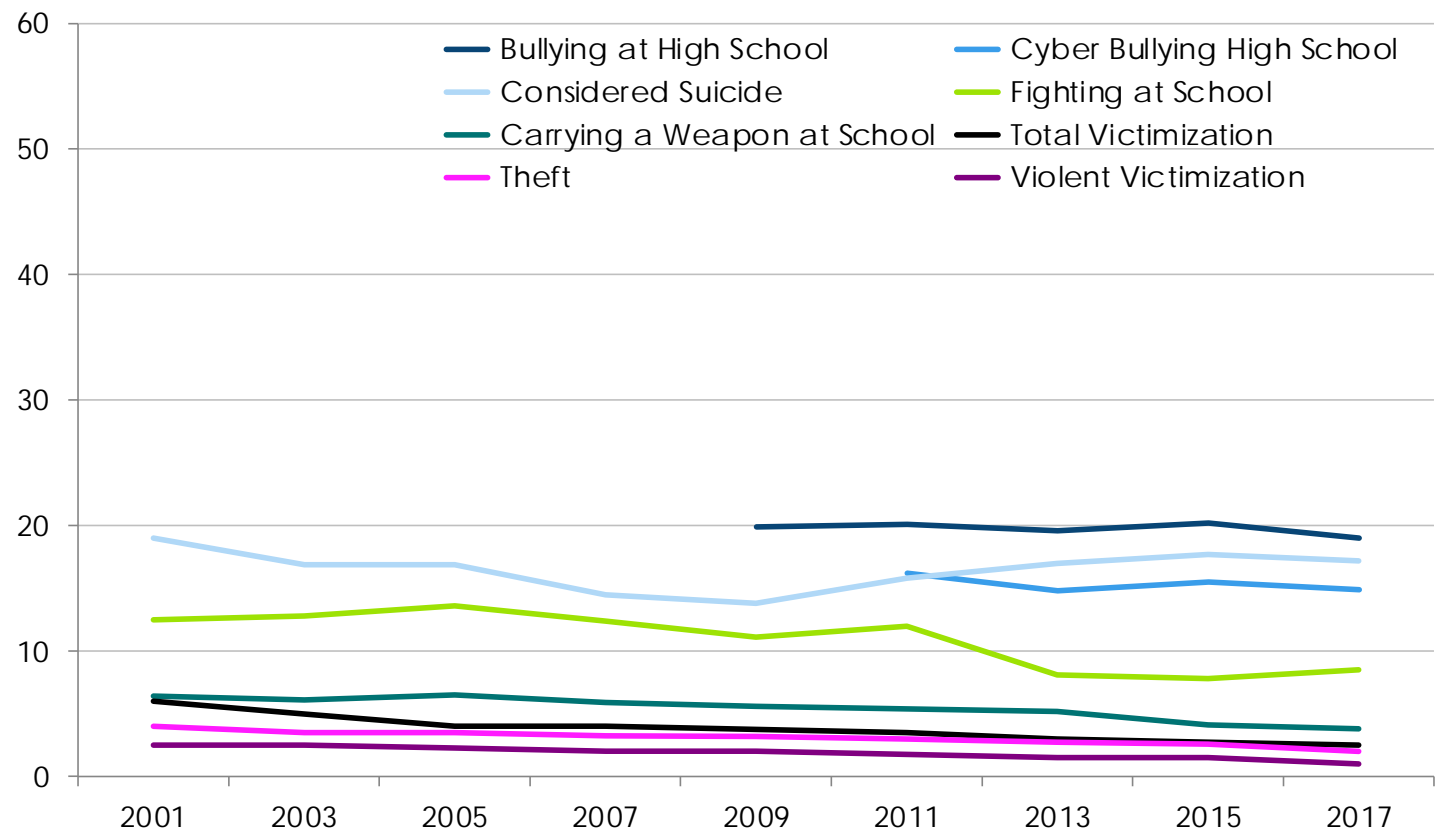
Self-harm	88
Motor vehicle accident	103
Assault by firearm outside of school	285
Pedestrian accident	556
Drowning	1,117
Cataclysmic storm	31,394
Venomous snakebite	37,500
Airline accident	188,364
Dog attack	115,111
Lightning	218,106





# Safety Concerns from Student Reports

## Safety Concerns at School | 2001–2017



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# Negative consequences for bullying victims

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## Short-Term Consequences

- Low self-esteem
- Poor school attendance
- Nervousness
- Difficulty making friends
- Poor peer relationships
- Increased problem internalization
- Withdrawal
- Feelings of helplessness, powerlessness, and rejection





## Long-Term Consequences

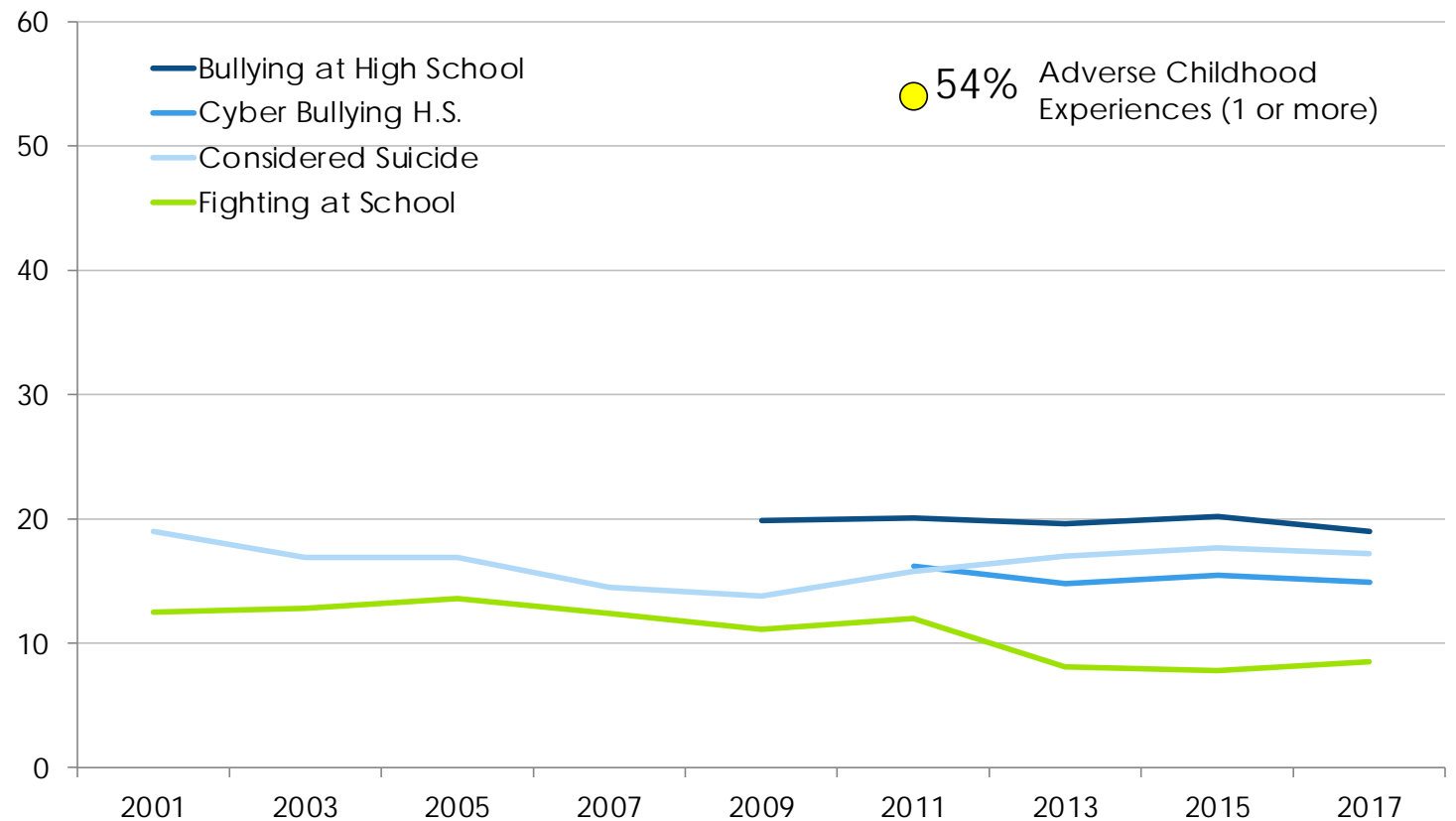
Increased rates of

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Intimacy problems
- Violence as adults

# ACEs and School Safety

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## School Safety Concerns by Prevalence | 2001–2017

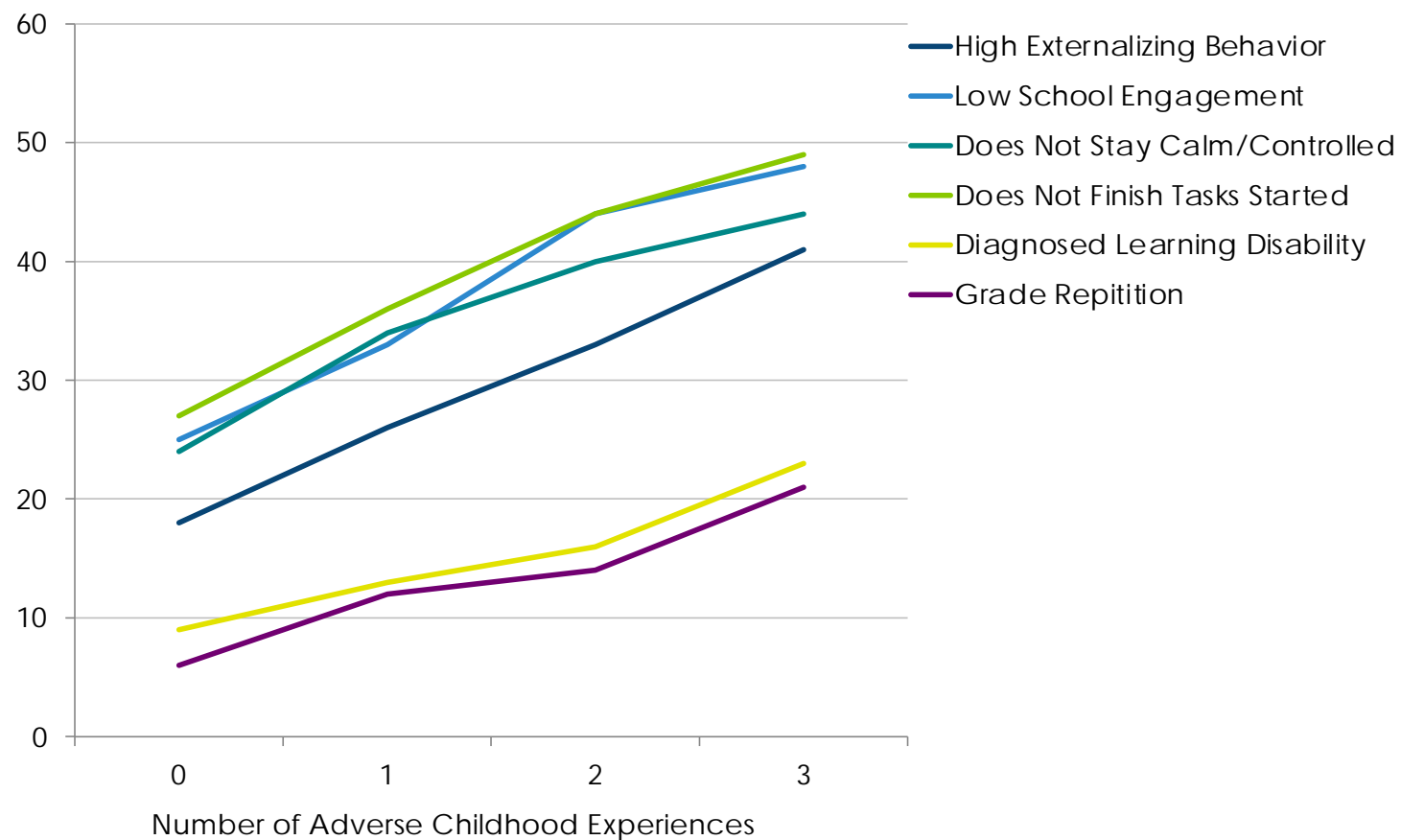


Child Trends, 2014

# ACEs and Well Being

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## ACEs and Negative Well-Being | Teens aged 12–17



Child Trends, 2014

## CONTEXT

### Adverse Childhood Experiences

54% report 1, 16% report 3 or more

- ▶ Divorce, parent death
- ▶ Parent incarceration
- ▶ Family mental illness
- ▶ Family alcohol/drug use
- ▶ Domestic violence
- ▶ Community violence
- ▶ Economic disadvantage

### Consequences

Aggression; difficulty staying calm, paying attention, impulse control

## CONCERNS

### Bullying | High Prevalence

- ▶ Bullies (15% of youth)
- ▶ Victims (20–30% of youth)
- ▶ Bully/victims
- ▶ Witnesses
- ▶ Cyberbullying (16%)

### Consequences

Depression, anxiety, suicidality, aggression, substance use, dropout

## STRATEGIES

### Safety Focused (no evidence)

- ▶ School Resource Officers
- ▶ Threat assessments
- ▶ Active shooter drills

### Support Focused

- ▶ Few effective programs, most K–6, modest effects
- ▶ CBITS—trauma, SafeDate
- ▶ Antibullying and cyberbully practices

### Mass Shooters | Low Prevalence, High Intensity

- ▶ Childhood trauma, a personal crisis/grievance
- ▶ A “script” that provides a roadmap (Columbine)
- ▶ Access to a firearm





## Safety-Focused Strategies

### School Resource Officers

51%

of U.S. public schools had a law enforcement officer on campus at least once a week (2017/18)

43%

of these schools had policies on SRO involvement with discipline

*MIGHT ENHANCE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON-PIPELINE*

### Threat Assessments

*MANY FALSE POSITIVES*





## Safety-Focused Strategies

### Active Shooter Drills

**95%** of U.S. students experienced lockdown training in 2018

**YOUNG STUDENTS DO NOT ALWAYS UNDERSTAND THAT THE DRILL IS A SIMULATION**  
(write good-bye letters, create wills)

**YOUTH WITH ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES MAY BE TRIGGERED**



## Evidence-Based Programs

U.S. Department of Education  
What Works Clearinghouse

**30%** (16) of 54 student behavior interventions for Grades K–12 show evidence of effectiveness

only **3** focus on school safety outcomes

Grades K–5

- Caring School Community
- Positive Action

Grades 6–12

- Too Good for Drugs/Violence

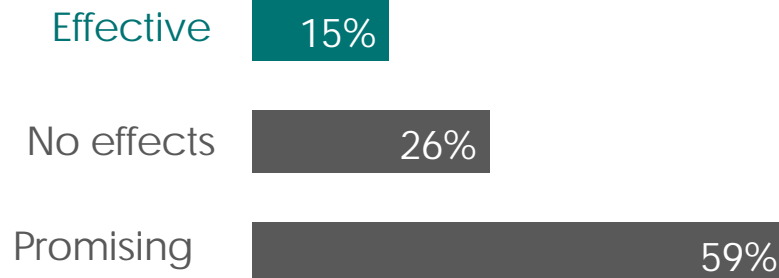


Support-Focused  
Strategies

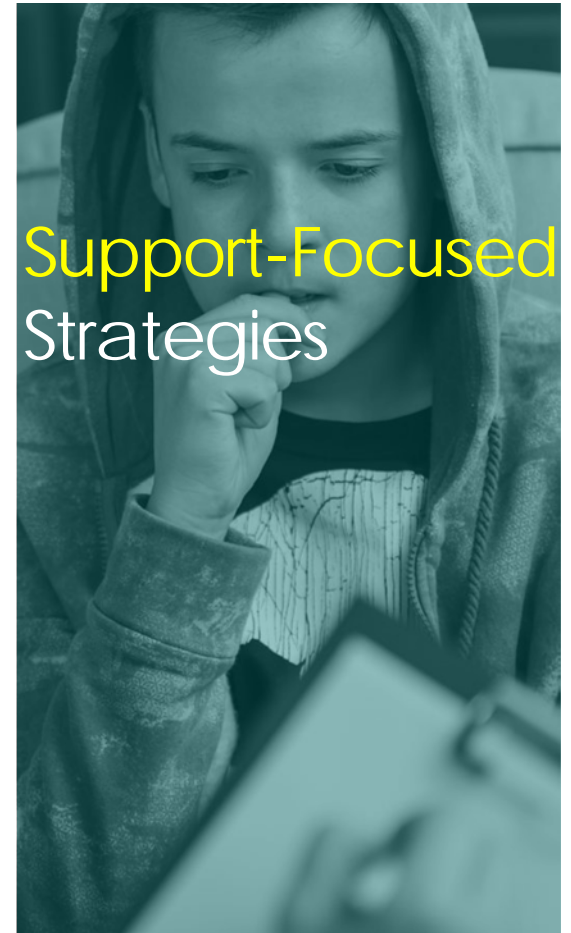
## Evidence-Based Programs

U.S. Department of Justice  
CrimeSolutions.gov

**15%** (26) of 170 student interventions  
show evidence of effectiveness



Support-Focused  
Strategies



## Evidence-Based Programs

U.S. Department of Justice  
CrimeSolutions.gov

Support-Focused  
Strategies

**46%** (12) of the 26 effective interventions are related to violence, aggression, or school safety

Grades K–5 **9** (74%) target elementary students

Grades 6–12 **4** (33%) target middle and high school students

- Big Brothers/Big Sisters
- Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS)
- Positive Family Support
- SafeDate

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# Summary

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Schools are **very safe places**.

- High-frequency problems such as bullying and adverse childhood experiences should be addressed.
- School safety strategies, such as lockdown drills and threat assessments, have no evidence of effectiveness, and can increase fear.
- **School support programs are more promising**, but few options exist for middle and high school students.

# For More Information

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