



## MEN AGAINST GUN VIOLENCE

### Prevent and Protect:

#### Three critical questions for school communities as they implement gun violence prevention programs

Males commit, and are victims of, 80-90% of all gun violence, which annually takes 35,000+ American lives a year, and is the second leading cause of death among children. Of the hundreds of mass shootings in the U.S. in recent years, all but three were committed by men or boys. Males take their own lives four times more frequently than women, largely because they are much more likely to use lethal firearms.<sup>1</sup>

Over the past decade, research psychologists have uncovered specific patterns among men and boys and their use of guns, including<sup>2</sup>:

- The single most reliable factor in predicting gun violence is the previous violent behavior of a man or boy.
- For many men, owning a firearm has become a rite of passage into manhood, and an important facet of American masculinity.
- When men or boys are emotionally troubled, they are much less likely to talk about their problems or seek professional help.
- Men and boys who commit gun violence increasingly see their acts as a way to be noticed and remembered after they are gone. Such publicity likely is also spawning “copycat” murders.
- All of the above has become more commonplace with ubiquitous access to guns (America represents 4% of the global population, and holds 42% of the world’s guns).

As schools implement gun violence prevention programs, they need keep in mind the high likelihood that boys or men will commit such violence, if it does occur.

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<sup>1</sup> Sources: Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Mother Jones* Mass Shootings database.

<sup>2</sup> Sources: “The Sociological explanation for why men in America turn to gun violence”; “Don’t Blame Mental Illness for Mass Shootings; Blame Men,” *Politico* magazine; “How male and female gun owners compare,” Pew Research Center; “The Evolutionary Psychology of Mass Shootings,” Association for Psychological Science; “Precarious Manhood and Its Links to Action and Aggression,” *Association for Psychological Science*; “Many Men With Mental Health Issues Don’t Seek Help,” *Health.com*; “Mass Murders Inspire Copycats, Study Finds,” *NBC News*; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; “Teen Homicide, Suicide and Firearm Deaths,” *ChildTrends*, <https://www.childtrends.org/indicators/teen-homicide-suicide-and-firearm-deaths>.

For that and other reasons, there is an urgent need for school communities to consider three important questions as they implement their gun violence prevention programs:

1. **Do we really understand enough about men and boys committing gun violence?**

A good place to begin learning more about these issues is to view the 13-minute video, “*Why is American masculinity at the center of gun culture, but not the gun debate?*”, which can be located at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjQqwrNQraA>. Also, school officials can review helpful analysis of important findings from leading psychological studies about males and gun violence, found at: <https://www.apa.org/pubs/info/reports/gun-violence-prevention>

2. **Are our administrators and counselors sufficiently equipped to work with boys who may have access to firearms, and whose emotional issues are likely more endemic to troubled young males?**

It is very important to avoid stigmatizing boys, but it is also critical to recognize that a few boys are more likely to respond violently to the pain they feel by using accessible guns. One way to approach this challenge is to focus on programs which technically apply to all students, but which actually impact male, far more often than female, students. As one example, Utah has recently tackled this problem statewide, as described here: <https://www.ksl.com/article/46628404/utah-launches-optional-gun-safety-program-for-schools>

3. **What program(s) can we consider to help address these challenges?**

One good source for guidance is a helpful recap of effective and to-be-tested techniques with potential male shooters, located at: <https://www.thetrace.org/2019/02/kids-gun-violence-strategies/>. Mentioned in that article is the work of *BAM (Becoming A Man)* organization, whose program site is located at: <https://www.youth-guidance.org/bam/>. While BAM works most frequently with inner-city young men, their learnings from their extensive work are often applicable to other school venues.

In recent years, definite progress has been made in bolstering the safety and peace of mind of our school communities. But that work cannot be fully accomplished without focusing more narrowly on the challenges facing the men and boys in and around our schools. It is a delicate subject that must be handled with sensitivity, but doing so will help us be sure once again that our children will be safe where they come to learn.