

America faces the frightening reality that one out of four girls and one out of six boys will be molested before they reach age 18.

School Safety

UPDATE

Child sexual abuse: an administrator's nightmare

In recent years, media accounts of children who have been sexually molested have intensified. In many cases, adults who were victimized as children have spoken up to tell horrendous stories of sexual abuse that they were forced to endure while growing up. Often these cases involve children who were molested by respected members of the community noted for exemplary devotion to helping others. Sometimes the offenders are employees of churches, associations and schools that have the responsibility for the safety of the children in their care.

The elimination and reduction of this abuse is the responsibility of every adult who comes into contact with children. Parents and educators should familiarize themselves with the most current information about sexual abuse to develop and implement effective prevention and early intervention strategies.

School administrators nationwide have been called upon to respond to various school-related sexual assault situations, including:

- a teacher who selects a needy student and molests him or her on an ongoing basis;
- a school janitor who exposes himself to a large number of children;

- the teacher who has "an affair" with a high school senior;
- the stranger who invades the school yard and abducts and rapes a student;
- the student — from kindergarten through college — who sexually assaults fellow students; and
- the incestuous parent whose behavior is revealed to school officials.

The school administrator today is faced with the frightening reality that one out of four girls and one out of six boys will be molested before their 18th birthday. Many of those molestations may occur in a school-related context. School systems have a legal as well as an ethical responsibility to proactively address this problem on a variety of levels.

In addressing child sexual abuse issues, two primary strategies emerge: keeping the molester away from children and keeping children away from the molester. The first challenge implies the need for effective record screening and selection of school staff. The second challenge underscores the need to train children to avoid individuals who make inappropriate overtures toward them.

Four enabling factors contribute to sexual assault. A proactive school system can use preventative measures to reduce the likelihood of the first two occurring and can intervene in the last two

of these factors. These four factors are:

- offender motivation to commit the abuse;
- disinhibiting factors that limit the offender's impulse control;
- an environment that allows the abuse to occur; and
- availability of victims.

Two of the factors involve characteristics of the offender.

COVER STORY

The child molester is motivated to engage in sexual behavior with partners who, due to their age or, in the case of the older student, their lack of power in the relationship, cannot meaningfully consent to the activity. This motivation may arise from a combination of complex physical, cognitive, emotional, behavioral, familial and societal factors. The motivational factors account for the desire to sexually molest another person, however, some individuals are able to control this motivation and do not assault children.

The disinhibitor factor allows the fantasy to be turned into a plan, and unfortunately in many cases, into a reality. Numerous contributors weaken impulse control. Among them are stress, loss of a job, alcohol or drug consumption, physical problems, peer pressure, and the cognitive ability to rationalize, minimize and justify one's behavior. When a child molester goes to court, many defense attorneys will often use these factors to build a case to reduce the client's sentence.

The third factor addresses the environment in which the assault occurs. This is not limited to the physical environment but most often reflects the social and cultural environment as well. The child molester must have the time and place to be able to lure the victim.

The fourth factor involves being able to access a particular victim. The sex offender seeks a range of individuals meeting certain age, gender, and physical and personality characteristics. The range of potential victims may be so wide as to include most children, or it may be very narrow, focusing on children from a certain gender or ethnic group or children with certain body types and hair color.

To address the first two factors, school systems should establish screening mechanisms to identify individuals who volunteer or who apply for employment and who may have a history of child molestation. Certainly a thorough background check should include the use of a computerized criminal history database. References should be carefully checked, particularly when there is a history of sudden, unexplained moves and/or frequent job changes.

Questions frequently arise regarding the identification of suspicious behaviors associated with child molesters. A good faith effort to protect children can turn into a witch hunt, in which the most devoted adults become the very ones who are accused. With that caution, school systems need to develop appropriate policies, procedures and employee training to increase the awareness of and guard against specific behaviors. These behaviors include:

- touch that is inappropriate for the age/sex of the student;
- singling out specific students for special attention or gifts without the full knowledge of the school administration;
- any attempt to conceal an interaction with a student; or
- any evidence that an employee has established a "peer" rather than a professional relationship with a student.

Most of these interactions could, in some instances, be perfectly innocent. One of the greatest danger signs is secrecy. Whenever a relationship with a student is concealed or shrouded in silence, the danger of sexual abuse is present.

School administrators are encouraged to take several preventive measures to screen individuals who may be motivated to molest children:

- Thoroughly screen all applicants/volunteers regarding past criminal history or questionable background.
- Establish a code of ethics related to relationships with students for all school staff.
- Establish clear policies and procedures consistent with state laws for reporting suspected child abuse.
- Establish clear policies and procedures regarding traveling with students, unacceptable gift-giving and socializing after school hours.
- Establish teacher and counselor training programs that focus on how to work with abused children after the investigation and court processes are finished.

In dealing with the second factor, disinhibitors, school administrators should establish Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) that can help in identifying and counseling employees who are under exceptional stress, suspected of having substance abuse problems, develop physical conditions which may contribute to job-related problems, or show attitudes or conduct which may be unprofessional. Such programs can intervene in a wide variety of problems and may salvage a valuable staff member who might otherwise be incapacitated by these conditions and cause serious damage to the students in their care.

The third factor in which school administrators can intervene is the environment. Analysis of a school's physical environment may reveal dark corridors, inaccessible spaces or hiding places in which sexual assaults may occur. Administrators should work closely with architects and security experts to design or modify school campuses in such a way that the buildings and grounds can be easily supervised. Thus, crimes of all types can be discouraged.

School administrators must also strive to create a social environment that is open, trusting and accessible as well as intolerant of any type of sexual harassment. The child molester will often screen potential victims by making slightly inappropriate sexual comments or subtly violating a student's boundaries through a physical touch or an inappropriately intimate comment. Schools must provide a safe means of reporting and investigating such conduct. Similar violations of a fellow staff member's boundaries should be seriously sanctioned, since adults in educational settings serve as role models for children.

COVER STORY

The fourth factor in which a school administrator may be able to intervene is with the potential victim. All students should receive personal safety training from kindergarten through high school. An appropriate sex education curriculum can be invaluable in clarifying the appropriate role of sexuality in one's life. It can also help to prevent the creation of more victims and more victimizing.

School officials should also seek to identify children who may be easy targets for molesters — children who have been sexually abused are often the target of other abusers.

It is impossible to predict who might become a sex offender; however once these persons have committed a first offense, society has a duty to protect other children from them. These individuals cross all socioeconomic barriers, professions, and ethnic groups. Even the assumption that all child molesters are males is incorrect. Women can and do sexually assault children and may be able to conceal the behavior better than their male counterparts.

Despite the diversity of sexual offenders, there are subgroups of child molesters that have common psychological dynamics and behavioral patterns. Numerous classification systems have been devised to explain why an adult would

want to have sexual relations with a child.

One basic distinction is between the pedophile, who is attracted to pre-pubescent children, and the hebephile, who is attracted to post-pubescent children. Another difference is between those who molest only girls, only boys, or both.

Another common distinction is made between the fixated and regressed pedophile. The fixated pedophile's primary source of sexual arousal comes from chronic and habitual thoughts, fantasies and behaviors related to children. A regressed pedophile often has age-appropriate sexual encounters but still fantasizes about children and, if presented with the opportunity at certain moments, will assault children.

Still another distinction is between the individual who courts the victims over months or years prior to molesting them and the perpetrator who assaults children randomly.

In studying the wide variety of typologies, simple stereotypes disappear, and the administrator may be confronted by an offender's distinctive methods of preying on the students in their charge.

In developing victim prevention programs, the school administrator can bear in mind that most child molesters are easily dissuaded by an assertive child. Molesters usually

Survey of inmates provides direction for prevention

Cellini, Schwartz and Radio surveyed a group of 105 convicted sex offenders incarcerated in Washington state. The type of crimes committed by this group of offenders were incest, child molestation, rape of adult women and all types of abuse. The offenders were questioned about their personal histories of abuse and asked to make recommendations about the most effective methods of abuse prevention and intervention.

More than 47 percent said that they had committed their first offense before age 17, but only 7 percent of these were apprehended as juveniles. Of the 75 percent who indicated that they had been sexually assaulted, 84 percent said that they had later committed an assault that was similar in nature to their own victimization.

Although nearly 66 percent of the sex offenders who had been victims stated that there was no way they could have avoided being assaulted, they did endorse screaming, fighting, running away, getting sick and acting crazy as somewhat helpful in stopping the abuse.

The sex offenders were also asked if they had ever started to assault someone and then stopped for any reason. Sixty-three percent of the offenders indicated that they did not stop once they had begun.

When asked to predict their response if the victim caused them severe physical pain, almost 46 percent of the offenders indicated that they would continue the assault and hurt the victim, while nearly 55 percent indicated that they would stop the assault.

In addition, the offenders recommended that the most effective approaches to reducing sexual assaults are: further education for children; more treatment for offenders and victims; parent education; and self-defense classes for victims.

When questioned about which group could be the most effective in reducing the incidences of sexual assault on children, the most common response was that schools needed to take the lead role in prevention.

When asked to specify what kinds of information educators should provide, the offenders recommended that, most importantly, children learn about offender characteristics. Other things that schools can do: provide abuse prevention education for children; encourage children to be open about abuse issues and to tell their parents and/or school officials; inform children how to avoid situations where abuse may occur; teach self-defense techniques; and provide parent awareness classes.

find it much easier to try to find a victim who can be easily manipulated or intimidated than to use force. Therefore, teaching a child assertive communication skills may have some positive benefits in fending off the initial interactions with the perpetrator.

There is much that is being done throughout the country, and school systems need to address the problem from a multifaceted perspective that involves students, parents, staff, and the community in protecting the children.

The following organizations can provide further information about child sexual abuse in the United States:

National Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse

332 South Michigan Avenue, Suite 1600
Chicago, IL 60604
312/663-3520

National Council on Child Abuse and Family Violence

1155 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 400
Washington, DC 20036
202/429-6695

Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information

P.O. Box 1182
Washington, D.C. 20013
800/394-3366

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

2101 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 550
Arlington, VA 22201
800/843-5678

National Child Abuse Hotline

800/422-4453

American Humane Association

Children's Division
9725 East Hamden Avenue
Denver, CO 80231
303/792-9900

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Signs and symptoms of sexual abuse

Sexual abuse victims may show the following "soft" sign indicators:

- difficulty with walking, sitting and playing;
- extreme modesty and unwillingness to change clothes or expose any body parts in the presence of others;
- extreme fear of being approached, touched or examined by others;
- extreme fear of going home, to school or day care, or to a friend's or relative's home;
- extreme fear of traveling with parent, relative or friend's parent;
- running away from home, leaving school or day care or from a relative's or friend's home;
- adolescent prostitution;
- sexual behaviors, references or vocabulary that are atypical or unusual for the child's age;
- sexual knowledge that is too sophisticated for the child's age;
- seductive behavior that appears to be inappropriate for the age of the child;
- withdrawn, infantile or fantasy-filled behavior;
- attempted suicide or talk of suicide;
- extreme changes in school performance and behavior;
- unaccountable accumulations of money, objects, clothing, candy or other material items; and
- indirect allusions of the child's fears, worries, concerns or anxieties.

Other signs of sexual abuse include such physical indicators as:

- stained or bloody clothing or underwear, either torn or not torn;
- blood or semen in or around the mouth, anus or genital area of a victim;
- the presence of inanimate or foreign objects in the anus or vagina;
- genitalia/anus that are swollen, inflamed, infected, bloody, bruised, torn, lacerated or have a lax muscle tone that suggests stretching or forcing;
- scars, scabs, cuts or bite marks on or around the genitals, buttocks, mouth, breasts, neck or thighs;
- sexually transmitted diseases in children;
- irritations, rashes, discharges or unusual odors around the genital area; and
- pregnancy (especially in young adolescent girls).

Ideas, programs and information to assist child advocates

In the interests of children

The National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Association will hold its 13th annual conference, "Mapping the Distance Home," in Tampa, Florida, on May 21-24, 1994. CASA uses trained community volunteers to speak up for abused and neglected children in court. Members from this leading child advocacy organization will gather with national experts and professionals to focus on the most critical challenges now facing those who work for the best interests of children. For conference registration information, call Amy Duncan or Michael Beneke at National CASA, 206/328-8588.

Anonymous reporting: a new trend

Students in the Sacramento (California) County can call an 800 number to anonymously report individuals who are carrying firearms or other dangerous weapons or who have them in their lockers or cars.

The hotline will be monitored by the Sheriff's Department, which will notify the schools with information, or in emergency situations, dispatch law enforcement officers immediately.

Courts have determined that school officials need reasonable cause to search for weapons. Calls to the hotline could provide reasonable suspicion, allowing legal searches.

Los Angeles Unified School District now has a hotline that takes anonymous tips about truant students. Local radio and television spot announcements advertise the number and attendance office staffers follow up on the tips.

Pittsburgh Public Schools uses a "silent complaint form" for students or staff to report criminal or suspicious activity, including rumors, to school police. Those wishing to file a report do not have to give their name or address, so their identity will remain unknown. Information requested on the form includes dates, times and locations of the activity as well as descriptions of persons and vehicles involved.

Students sign commitment to safety

Students at Hilsman Middle School in Athens, Georgia, are

asked to sign a commitment to safety agreement. Parents of students who refuse to sign are asked to participate in a conference with the principal and the student. The commitment to safety contract states:

"I agree to make an earnest commitment to safety here at Hilsman. I agree to do the following:

- Respect myself at all times.
- Possess no dangerous items or substances.
- Speak kindly to my friends, schoolmates and all adults.
- Fight or argue with no one.
- Be a good citizen at all times."

Basketball helps wayward youths

Last year, the city of Beloit, Wisconsin, began a midnight basketball league geared for under-employed or unemployed young men. Beloit is the smallest among 31 cities in the country that have organized such leagues.

Midnight basketball is more than simply a recreational basketball league. Basketball serves as an attractive hook to get participants off the streets. Goals include:

- improving the self-esteem of the participants;
- providing an alternative to antisocial or criminal activities of young males between the ages of 17 and 25;
- developing a network of social support services; and
- facilitating employment and job training opportunities.

Two nights a week for 10 weeks, Beloit's six-team league played games from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. After each game, players were required to attend mandatory self-improvement seminars. They were also bound by a strict code of conduct, which included no swearing, no wearing of gang-style clothing or jewelry, and no lawbreaking. Violators were automatically suspended from the league.

At the onset of Beloit's league, 60 percent of the players were on probation or parole; 40 percent were high school dropouts, and 80 percent were unemployed. At the end of the season, of the original 60 players, six had enrolled in college, 30 were working toward high school equivalency degrees and 17 had found jobs.

For further information about Beloit's midnight basketball program, contact Captain Charles A. Tubbs, Beloit Police Department, City Hall, 100 State St., Beloit, WI 53511.

Less than rave reviews

A newer kind of party is gaining in popularity — the Rave party. Frequently an all-nighter, the event centers around the use of hallucogenic drugs and/or nitrous oxide. Loud music is provided, often by a D.J. Locations may change on a weekly basis to avoid detection from law enforcement, and some parents' organizations report "production companies" that specialize in scheduling Rave parties.

Federal grants enhance state child protective services

To assist states in combating child abuse and neglect, the United States Code sets forth conditions for grants to improve child protective service systems in five areas:

- intake and screening of abuse and neglect reports through receipt of information, decision making, public awareness, and training of staff;
- investigation of such reports through better response time, decision making, referral to services and staff training; use of multidisciplinary teams and interagency protocols to enhance investigations; and legal preparation and representation;
- case management and delivery services provided to families and an increase in the numbers of families served;
- assessment tools, automation systems that support the program, information referral systems and the overall training of staff to meet minimum competencies; or
- developing, strengthening, and implementing abuse and neglect prevention, treatment and research programs.¹

States must qualify for grants. The first requirement is a state law with provisions for reporting known and suspected instances of child abuse and neglect and provisions for immunity from prosecution for those who report.

Second, the state must initiate a prompt investigation to substantiate the accuracy of the report. A finding of abuse or neglect requires that immediate steps be taken to protect the welfare of the child and of any other child under the same care who may be in danger of abuse or neglect.

The state must also demonstrate that it has procedures, personnel, facilities, and related multidisciplinary programs and services necessary to ensure that child abuse and neglect cases will be dealt with effectively.

A fourth requirement is that the state must preserve the confidentiality of all records to protect the rights of the child and of the child's parents or guardians, including methods to ensure that disclosure of information is made only to persons or entities that the state determines have a need for such information.

Additional requirements include: the prompt disclosure

of all relevant information to any federal, state or local governmental entity, or any agent of such entity, with a need for such information; provisions for the cooperation of law enforcement officials, courts of competent jurisdiction and appropriate state agencies providing human services; and provisions that a guardian ad litem be appointed in every case which results in a judicial proceeding to represent the child.

All 50 states have enacted some form of child abuse reporting requirements. Illinois has a typical statute with a lengthy list of persons mandated to report child abuse and neglect, including school personnel and truant officers.² In addition to those required to report suspected cases, any person may report if they have a reasonable cause to believe a child may be abused or neglected. In Illinois, the report must be made immediately to the Department of Children and Family Services. In some states, a person may report to one of several agencies, such as social services or law enforcement. In one California case, a principal violated the statute by reporting to school security and not a law enforcement agency.

Ignorance of the law will not excuse a person who fails to report. In Illinois, any person who is mandated by virtue of employment to report must sign a statement that he/she has knowledge and understanding of the reporting requirements. The statement must be signed prior to employment and the form is retained by the employer. And, although states provide absolute immunity for mandated reporters who report in good faith, failure to report or the filing of a false report can lead to criminal and/or civil liability.

Author James Rapp makes the following suggestions for educational institutions. First, review state law. Know the requirements. Who must report? To whom? When? Second, establish appropriate policies and procedures for compliance. These could include procedures for prompt reporting or what to do if the police or other agencies seek to question students at school. Finally, schools should instruct employees on how to handle suspected child abuse cases. Although an employee may have been told that he is a mandated reporter under the law, schools are advised to conduct an in-service which explains the law and instructs the employee how to fill out the appropriate forms. Many teachers and others who work closely with children want to report child abuse and neglect, but sometimes do not know how or labor under the mistaken notion that even a good faith report could expose them to liability.³

Endnotes

1. 42 U.S.C. s. 5106a.
2. Ill. Ann. Stat. ch. 325, para. 5/4 (Smith-Hurd 1993).
3. *Education Law* § 6.05[5][b][ii][B].

Multimedia tools help prevent child victimization

A picture is worth a thousand words

A missing child is a parent's worst nightmare. While proper precautions and learning safety skills go a long way toward protecting children, abductions and cases of lost or runaway children now occur at an alarming rate.

Project KidCare is a program developed jointly by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and the Polaroid Corporation. Its goal is to provide parents with standardized personal safety documents for their children, featuring an instant color photograph of the child. Similar in size and appearance to a passport, the KidCare Photo ID is a small booklet containing emergency information helpful in locating and identifying a missing child.

A complete guide to help organizations plan a successful KidCare Photo ID event includes instructions for: hosting an event, choosing a location, finding a sponsor to help defray costs, seeking local partnerships, working with the media, involving the community, promoting the event, and managing the event successfully.

Self-starters willing to take on a worthwhile project can obtain the free planning guide from the Polaroid Corporation, 575 Technology Square, Cambridge, MA 02139, 800/448-3400.

Helping to take a bite out of crime

McGruff the Crime Dog explains to his nephew Scruff about child abuse and some of the forms it can take: physical abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. McGruff emphasizes that these actions are crimes, and that all children have a right to feel safe and protected.

Directed towards primary audiences, this 20-minute video depicts three children who have a scary personal secret. In order to deal with their problems, each child has to decide to tell the secret to a trusted adult. Especially helpful are the explanations of the differences between "good" secrets and "bad" secrets and "telling" and "tattling."

McGruff on Self-Protection: Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect is available from AIMS Media, 9710 DeSoto Ave., Chatsworth, CA 91311-4409, 800/367-2467.

Teaching kids to be safe

SAFE I, a physical and sexual abuse prevention program, is one part of the Project Charlie curriculum. SAFE I is designed to teach children about good and bad touch, assertiveness skills, response in dangerous situations, and respect for oneself and others. This curriculum targets the elementary ages, with one component for levels K - 3 and another for 4 - 6. The lessons attempt to teach children, in a nonthreatening manner, that they are vulnerable. Giving them the skills to avoid dangerous situations reduces their likelihood of victimization.

Training is required to implement this program. More information is available from Project Charlie, 4570 West 77th St., Suite 198, Edina, MN 55435, 800/279-5437.

No more victims

Another child abuse prevention curriculum is the *Talking About Touching* series for preschool through eighth grade. In these personal safety lessons, children learn to "recognize, resist, and report" in order to avoid exploitation and victimization. Topics cover appropriate and inappropriate touch; the differences among passive, assertive and aggressive behavior; verbal and nonverbal assertiveness skills; and who, how and when to tell. For more information, contact the Committee for Children, 172 20th Ave., Seattle, WA 98122, 206/322-5050.

Superhero has his say

A partnership between the National Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Marvel Comics features Spider-Man in a series of three comic books addressing the issues of sexual, physical and emotional abuse.

The sexual abuse comic book shows the strategies that two children use to escape victimization, but does not give unrealistic expectations for an instant "happy ending." Throughout, Spider-Man stresses that sexual abuse is never the fault of the victim. Information is available from the ordering department, NCPA, 200 State Rd., South Deerfield, MA 01373, 800/835-2671.

Increasing a child's personal safety

The Adam Walsh Child Resource Center and National Center for Missing and Exploited Children have developed a safety program for young children. *KIDS AND COMPANY: Together for Safety* stresses good choices in each situation, and teaches when and how to get help. A parent component includes a chart and stickers, to encourage practicing the skills at home. For more information about this program, write to the Adam Walsh Child Resource Center, Inc., 3111 South Dixie Highway, Suite 244, West Palm Beach, FL 33405.

Listening, reporting, training, teaching: a compelling call

School administrators who have been effective in handling gangs, drugs, guns and violence are discovering that youngsters are now coming to them with a host of other special needs related to abuse and neglect. When students feel they have an attentive ear, they are much more likely to share their special concerns. The administrator's reward for creating a safe and welcoming environment is that schoolchildren will give him/her more issues to address. The compelling call for increasing levels of service is a compliment to the school administrator's effectiveness.

A school administrator's responsibilities in dealing with issues of child sexual abuse are multifaceted. The administrator must be directly involved in the prevention of sexual assault and harassment at school or school-related events, whether these acts stem from professional misconduct on the part of a staff member or inappropriate behavior displayed by a student or a volunteer.

School officials must also indirectly intervene in a student's abusive home situation by reporting their suspicions to local authorities. Responding to such situations calls for an awareness of the signs of possible abuse plus a working

knowledge of reporting procedures.

But an effective school administrator's duty does not end with these responsibilities. Staff members need training regarding what is considered an appropriate professional relationship with students. This includes school policies, code of ethics, legal liability and the duty to report, procedures for reporting suspected child abuse, as well as curriculum strategies that empower children to resist abuse.

Although there are never any guarantees that bad things will not occur, children can be taught concepts and skills that will lessen their chances of falling victim to sexual abuse. Experts tell us that teaching children basic skills — knowing one's full name and address and how to use the telephone and avoid strangers — are a good beginning. Teaching more advanced concepts, including an awareness of when to keep secrets, what is inappropriate touching and the difference between telling versus tattling, enhances children's concepts of self-worth and assertiveness.

NSSC is working with the Missing and Exploited Children Comprehensive Action Program to develop training materials that will include model guidelines, policy statements and sample forms for employee/applicant screening and selection procedures. The Spring 1994 issue of *School Safety* newsjournal will report on this aspect of child abuse prevention in greater detail.

Twenty-eight governors joined NSSC in observing this year's *America's Safe Schools Week*, including governors from Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

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The *School Safety Update* is published by the National School Safety Center to communicate current trends and effective programs in school safety. As a component of the NSSC **School Safety News Service**, the newsletter is published six times each school year; the newsjournal is published three times a year in the fall, winter and spring. Annual subscription to **NSSC School Safety News Service**: \$59.00. Correspondence should be addressed to: NSSC, 4165 Thousand Oaks Blvd., Suite 290, Westlake Village, CA 91362, telephone 805/373-9977, FAX 805/373-9277.

Prepared under Grant No. 85-MU-CX-0003 and funded in the amount of \$1.2 million by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, and the U.S. Department of Education in partnership with Pepperdine University. Points of view or opinions in this document do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Departments of Justice or Education

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