

SCHOOL SHOOTINGS & YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH



WISCONSIN OFFICE OF CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

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WHY THIS MATTERS

School shootings have a traumatic effect not only on the children in the school, but also their teachers, families, and community as a whole. This trauma can cause long-term harm to youth mental health and well-being. By ramping up anti-bullying programs, promoting a culture of help-seeking, and building awareness of warning signs, we can empower students to report concerns, help prevent school violence, and support kids who struggle to get the help they need.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

School shootings in the U.S. are now at their highest recorded levels. The most recent five school years show a substantially higher number of school shootings than the prior 20 years. In the past 25 years, there were nearly 1,500 school shootings in the U.S, which is 57 times greater than all other major industrialized nations combined.¹

Most attackers take firearms from their home, or from home of another close relative.²

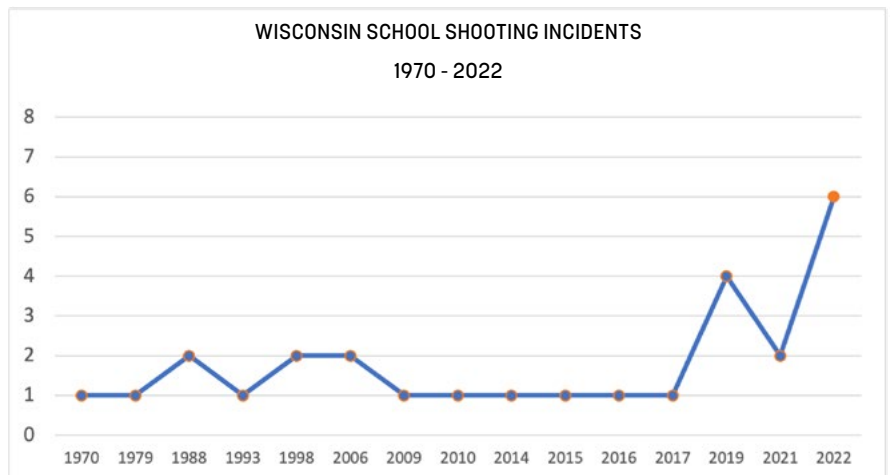
Research on youth survivors of shootings finds that children experience long term physical and mental trauma. Anxiety, depression, and PTSD along with hypervigilance and fear are common mental health conditions of shooting survivors.

Research also finds that teen survivors engage in more risky behavior. These children—and their parents—face enormous obstacles and costs to their health and well-being.

Children who survive shootings have twice as many pain disorders, are 68% more likely to have a psychiatric diagnosis, and 144% as likely to develop a substance use disorder than those who did not experience a shooting. The survivors' parents also had increased rates of psychiatric disorders and mental health visits.³

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN WISCONSIN?

According to the Center for Homeland Defense and Security, between 1970 and 2022, there have been 27 school-based incidents in Wisconsin.⁴ Nearly 60% of these shootings have occurred in the last eight years.



The Wisconsin Office of School Safety (OSS), part of the Department of Justice, was launched in 2018. OSS provides training that helps Wisconsin public and private schools deter, prevent, mitigate, and respond to school violence. OSS training covers physical safety, student behavior, and school climate, as well as mitigating trauma in school safety drills.



OSS also hosts a confidential, 24-hour tip line. By January 2024, OSS received its 10,000th contact to the [Speak Up, Speak Out Tipline](#). Many of the tips required immediate intervention from school officials and local law enforcement, including nearly 200 concerns about planned school attacks, over 200 reports of guns or weapons, and over 350 related to suicide threats.⁵

WHAT WE CAN DO

➤ PARENTS/CAREGIVERS:

- Familiarize yourself with [Be Smart](#), which includes specific lessons on secure gun storage.
- Discuss bullying with your child. Use the [Parent Playbook](#) to build kindness and empathy at home.
- Ensure your child knows about [Speak Up Speak Out](#) (SUSO).

➤ SCHOOLS:

- Commit to school safety best practices utilizing [Office of School Safety](#) and [National School Safety Center](#) resources.
- Conduct a safety needs assessment, using the [Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management Protocol \(BTAM\)](#), and attend a [BTAM course](#).
- Ensure a robust [Bullying Prevention](#) program is in place and leverage [bullying resources](#) to prevent school violence.
- Encourage help-seeking among students, teaching them how it bolsters mental health.
- Build awareness among students, staff, and parents of the [Speak Up Speak Out](#) (SUSO) tipline and the importance of [safe storage](#).
- Educate staff on drills that do no psychological harm, via [Mitigating Trauma in School Safety Drills](#).
- Alert parents and students in advance that drills will be conducted.
- Ensure every student has a trusted adult in the building.

➤ PROVIDERS:

- Partner with schools in creating intervention plans for youth.
- Embed mental health into your primary care practice.
- Discuss safe storage with families as recommended by the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#).

➤ POLICYMAKERS:

- Support funding school safety best practices.
- Pass a safe storage requirement.
- Strengthen Wisconsin's child access prevention law.

➤ COMMUNITIES:

- Learn about Targeted Violence Prevention for communities in this online course [Foundations of Targeted Violence Prevention - WI](#).
- Review and share [Making Prevention a Reality](#), the FBI's practical guide on targeted violence, which includes concrete strategies to help communities prevent these types of incidents.

WHAT HELPS

School Belonging: Students who feel they belong at their school, who are connected to peers and adults in the school, feel safe and welcomed. This protects their physical and psychological safety. School cultures that are welcoming, inclusive, and positive with strong anti-bullying programs tend to have better school belonging, and fewer isolated students.

Safe Storage: Secure storage of firearms saves lives. Keeping guns locked, unloaded, and separate from ammunition—whether in the home or at a storage facility—is associated with a lower risk of firearm injuries. Safe storage also reduces the risk of youth taking their parent's weapons out of the home, lowering the risk of gun violence and suicide.

School Safety Drills: Lockdowns and safety drills are important components of safety planning. Drills must be carefully planned and implemented and meet the needs of all students – including nonverbal students, those with limited mobility, and those with anxiety and trauma histories.

Non-sensorial drills, such as a typical fire drill in which staff and students practice where and when to exit the building, are a recommended practice because they build the knowledge and skills of how to respond to an event in a calm manner.

REFERENCES:

¹ *Pediatrics*, School Shootings in the United States: 1997-2022. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2023-06431>

² Center for Homeland Defense and Security. School Shooting Safety Compendium. Retrieved 3/20/24 from <https://www.chds.us/sssc/>

³ *Health Affairs*. Firearm Injuries in Children and Adolescents: Health and Economic Consequences. <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2023.00587>

⁴ Incidents are documented in the K-12 School Shooting Database when a gun is brandished, is fired, or a bullet hits school property for any reason, regardless of the number of victims, time of day, or day of week. <https://www.chds.us/sssc/>

⁵ OSS, DOJ Press Release. 1/26/24. Accessed: <https://www.doj.state.wi.us/news-releases/office-school-safety-receives-10000th-contact-speak-speak-out-tipline>.