



Aggression and crime prevention in schools

General tips

- Practice evacuation and emergency response drills with employees and students annually.
- Keep a complete list of staff members who have keys to the building(s).
- Establish a social media policy for staff and students to adhere to. Regularly monitor social media to identify potential risks.
- Establish a policy to have the school campus fully lighted or totally dark at night.
- Cover drainpipes so they cannot be climbed.
- Limit roof access by keeping rubbish bins and other materials that could be used to climb onto away from building walls.
- Prohibit posters in classroom windows.
- Close off unused stairwells or do not leave areas of the school unused.
- If the basketball, netball, volleyball or tennis courts are attracting unwanted behaviour after school hours, remove the nets and hoops at the end of the school day as this will reduce their opportunity for use and the attractiveness of the site.
- Consider providing duress alarms to teachers in isolated locations.
- Conduct a thorough background check on anyone applying to work in the school to assure that no one is hired who has been convicted of sexual assault, child molestation, or pornography, or has a history of violent criminal behaviour. Do not make a hiring decision before the check is completed. (i.e. Working with children check and Police Clearance)
- Offer school- or community-based activities for students after school.
- Do not allow graffiti to linger on walls. Follow the three 'Rs' after discovery-read, record (i.e. photograph or videotape) and remove. Inflammatory bathroom graffiti needs to be removed daily.

External sources of aggression

External sources of aggression include intruders and strangers to the school.

Built environment design tips

- If the gym is required for after school activities, have facilities to lock off the rest of the campus from the gym during after school hours.
- Locate the Administration / Reception building at the front of the school to control access of visitors and reduce the opportunity for visitors to walk around school grounds.
- School boundaries should be fenced off to restrict unwanted access during and after school hours.
- All fire exits should be exit only with no handles for re-entry. Doors should be alarmed and have a mechanism to notify employees when the door has been opened.

- Provide a communication method between the Administration building and classrooms.
- Grouping smaller windows to function as a larger window allows sufficient natural light and ventilation. The smaller size makes it difficult to crawl through or remove property.
- Locate bicycle storage racks outside the main office windows or classroom windows to reduce potential theft to allow for natural surveillance.
- Light all hallways adequately during the day.
- Install all lockers in areas where they are easily visible, or remove lockers altogether.
- Minimise blind spots; use convex mirrors by portable classrooms or to allow employees to see around corners.
- Install an alarm system and/or a closed-circuit television monitoring system.
- Locate playground equipment where it is easily observed.
- Avoid decorative hedges; plant trees at least 3 metres from buildings.
- Trim trees and shrubs to limit outside hiding places for people or weapons.
- Ensure hedges and trees do not obstruct natural surveillance.
- Keep school grounds free of gravel or loose rock surfaces.
- Ensure vehicle access around the building(s) for night surveillance and emergency vehicles.

Client related sources of aggression

Students and parents of students are defined as the clients in schools as teachers are providing a service to the students and subsequently their parents.

De-escalating anger and aggression in students and parents

Confronting an angry, potentially aggressive students and parents can increase or decrease the potential for problems. Develop de-escalation procedures, such as the following, with employees and practice them through role-play:

- Reduce the person's potential to engage in face-saving aggression by removing any spectators. For example, ask to speak with them in the administration building rather than in the classroom in front of parents and students.
- Take a nonthreatening stance with your body at an angle to the person and your empty hands at your sides in plain sight.
- Maintain a calm demeanour and steady, level voice, even in the face of intense verbal disrespect or threats from the person.
- Acknowledge the person's emotional response empathetically—for example, 'You're really angry, and I want to understand why.'
- Control the interaction by setting limits—such as, 'I want you to sit down before we continue' or 'We can talk, but only if you stop swearing.'
- Provide problem-solving counselling with a school psychologist or counsellor at the earliest opportunity.

References

National Association of School Psychologists. *Creating a safe school building*.
http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/neat_buildings.aspx

Larson, Jim. (2008). *Anger and Aggressive Students*.
<http://www.nasponline.org/resources/principals/Angry%20and%20Aggressive%20Students-NASSP%20Jan%2008.pdf>

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