

Four in 10 Students Report Potentially Violent Classmates

Four in 10 American high school students say they have classmates who might be troubled enough to stage a Littleton-style attack at their school, and as many report anti-social and potentially violent cliques there.

Their parents are markedly less aware of these potential dangers.

Forty percent of students in an ABC News/Washington Post poll can think of a classmate “who might be troubled enough to do something like” the Littleton massacre, and 40 percent report students at their school “who hang out together and who seem to be especially troubled, anti-social and perhaps prone to violence.”

Fewer parents – about a quarter – can think of such a student or are aware of such groups, the national survey found. And that’s still millions of high school parents, one in four.

The presence of potentially violent students is coupled with an apparent lack of universal monitoring: As far as they’re aware, only about 55 percent of students and parents alike say their high school tries to identify troubled students who may be prone to violence. More than 90 percent say such screening should be going on.

These results are among several in the poll that raise concern about the risk of more attacks of the kind that struck Columbine High School last week. Among others:

-One in five high schoolers say they personally know a student who’s brought a gun to school – and the vast majority of them, 83 percent, say they did not report it to an adult.

-Far more students – 54 percent – say it would be easy for them to get a gun. (About half say there’s already a gun at their home). Even more, 67 percent, say it would be easy for them to get information on how to make bombs.

-Nearly a third of students have heard a classmate at their school threaten to kill someone. Again, most – 78 percent – never reported it, in most cases because they didn’t take it seriously. Five percent (one in 20) say someone’s threatened to kill them.

-One in five students report classmates at their school whom they consider to be neo-Nazis or skinheads. Parents are less likely to know about it.

NO PANIC - Still, Columbine has not incited anything like panic among most students or parents. Three-quarters of students and parents alike say violence is not a serious problem at their school; 88 percent of students feel personally safe; and 70 percent of students rate their school security as “excellent” or “good.” Sixty-one percent of parents agree.

But clearly there’s room for improvement. Well under half of students, 42 percent, feel “very” safe from violence at their school, and 40 call it "somewhat" or even "very" likely that a Littleton-style attack could occur there.

Anxiety runs higher among parents, even though they're less likely to know of potentially violent students or cliques. Just 27 percent of parents think their child is "very safe" at school. Forty-nine percent call a Littleton-style attack somewhat or very likely. And fewer than half of parents, 45 percent, say their child's school is doing enough to prevent violence there.

SECURITY - The survey points to several specific areas of improvement in school security; in addition to broader screening of potentially violent students, these include the use of metal detectors (now very rare), random searches of student lockers and even random searches of students themselves. Among the measures:

-Random searches of lockers. Barely over half of students say their schools currently do it. Far more favor it: Sixty-eight percent of students, and 81 percent of parents, say their school should randomly search student lockers.

-Random searches of students. Not the norm; just a quarter of students say their schools currently conduct random searches of students themselves. But 50 percent of students say such searches should be instituted, and 56 percent of parents agree.

-Metal detectors. They're rare now; only five percent of students (and parents) say their schools have metal detectors in place. Again, 50 percent of students, and 59 percent of parents, say the devices should be installed.

-Screening. As noted above, 55 percent of students (and about the same number of parents) say their school tries to identify troubled students who may be prone to violence. (Thirteen percent of students, and 25 percent of parents, don’t know whether or not this is done.) More than 90 percent of students and parents say it should occur.

Most students and parents also support having police or armed guards patrol their school. And there's near-unanimous support for effective counseling of troubled students, which most say is already in place.

	----Done now----		--Should be done--	
	Students	Parents	Students	Parents
Metal detectors	5%	5	50	59
Random student searches	25	21	50	56
Random locker searches	51	49	68	81
Identify violent students	55	56	93	97

Police/armed guards	61	50	69	65
Provide good counseling	88	80	98	97

GROUPS - There's not much difference in concerns about potential violence among city, suburban and rural students, nor in matters such as knowing someone who brought a gun to school, or having heard a student threaten to kill someone.

Instead, concerns about violence tend to revolve around issues of security and personal exposure to potentially violent students. For example, students who say they have neo-Nazi or skinhead classmates are 19 percentage points less likely than other students to feel "very" safe at school, 27 percent to 46 percent.

In other examples, 54 percent of students who say there's an anti-social group at their school say a Littleton-style attack could occur there, compared to 30 percent of those who say there's no such clique at their school. And students who've heard a classmate threaten to kill someone are twice as likely to say violence is a problem at their school.

METHODOLOGY – This survey was conducted by telephone April 22-25 among a random national sample of 500 high school teen-agers and 522 parents of high school teen-agers. Of these interviews, 382 were conducted with parents and teenagers in the same household. The results have a 4.5-point error margin. Field work by ICR-International Communications Research, of Media, Pa.

Analysis by Gary Langer.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet, at: <http://www.abcnews.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html>

Full results follow.

1. In your opinion, is violence at your high school* a very serious problem, somewhat serious, not too serious or not much of a problem at all?

	-----Serious-----			-----Not serious-----			No
	NET	Very	Smwht	NET	Not too	Not at all	opin.
4/25/99 Teen	23	5	18	77	29	49	0
4/25/99 Parent	23	4	19	76	31	46	1

*Parents" "Your child's high school."

2. Would you say you personally feel very safe from violence at your school, somewhat safe, somewhat unsafe, or very unsafe?

	-----Safe-----			-----Unsafe-----			No
	NET	Very	Smwht	NET	Smwht	Very	opin.
4/25/99 Teen	88	42	47	11	9	2	*
4/25/99 Parent	82	27	55	17	14	3	1

3. How would you rate the security precautions that your school has in place to try to prevent violence there? Would you say the security at your school is excellent, good, not so good or poor?

	----Exc/Good----	-----Not good/poor-----	No
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	NET	Exc	Good	NET	Not good	Poor	opin.
4/25/99 Teen	70	12	59	29	19	10	*
4/25/99 Parent	61	9	52	35	22	13	4

4. Do you think your school is doing enough to try to prevent violence there, or should it be doing more?

	Doing enough	Should do more	No opinion
4/25/99 Teen	57	42	1
4/25/99 Parent	45	50	5

5. As you may know, two students shot and killed several people at a high school in Littleton, Colorado this week. What's the chance this kind of thing could happen at your school - would you say it's very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, or very unlikely?

	-----Likely-----			-----Unlikely-----			No
	NET	Very	Smwht	NET	Smwht	Very	opin.
4/25/99 Teen	40	9	31	58	29	29	2
4/25/99 Parent	49	11	37	48	27	21	4

6. Can you think of any students at your own school who you think might be troubled enough to do something like this?

	Yes	No	No opinion
4/25/99 Teen	40	59	2
4/25/99 Parent	23	68	9

7. At your school is there any group of students who hang out together and who seem to be especially troubled, anti-social and perhaps prone to violence?

	Yes	No	No opinion
4/25/99 Teen	40	58	1
4/25/99 Parent	24	62	13

8. (and 9.) I'm going to name a few things your school might or might not do in an effort to prevent violence there. (First/next) is (read item). As far as you know, is that something your school does or does not do? ...Now for each one, please tell me if that's something you think your school should or should not be doing. Should your school (read item), or not?

	-----Teens 4/25/99-----						
	Does	Does not	No opin.	Should	Should not	No	opin.
a. Try to identify troubled students who may be prone to violence	55	32	13	93	6	1	
b. Have metal detectors at school entrances	5	94	1	50	49	1	
c. Conduct random searches of students' lockers	51	46	3	68	31	*	
d. Conduct random searches of students themselves	25	72	3	50	49	1	
e. Have police officers or armed security guards on patrol at the school	61	38	1	69	30	1	
f. Offer effective counseling and other assistance to troubled students	88	10	2	98	1	1	
	-----Parents 4/25/99-----						
	Does	Does not	No	Should	Should not	No	opin.

	Does	not	opin.	Should	not	opin.
a. Try to identify troubled students who may be prone to violence	56	19	25	97	2	1
b. Have metal detectors at school entrances	5	90	5	59	37	5
c. Conduct random searches of students' lockers	49	36	15	81	17	2
d. Conduct random searches of students themselves	21	59	20	56	42	2
e. Have police officers or armed security guards on patrol at the school	50	47	3	65	33	2
f. Offer effective counseling and other assistance to troubled students	80	12	9	97	2	1

10. Do you personally know any students who have ever brought a gun to your school, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
4/25/99 Teen	20	79	1
4/25/99 Parent	13	83	3

10a. (IF YES) Did you report it to a teacher or some other adult, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
4/25/99 Teen	16	83	1

10b. (IF NO in Q10.) If you did know a student who brought a gun to school, do you think you would report it to a teacher or some other adult, or not? (Not asked of parents)

	Yes	No	No opinion
4/25/99 Teen	90	9	1
4/25/99 Parent*	82	11	7

* If your child knew a student who brought a gun to school, do you think your child would report it to a teacher or some other adult, or not?

11. Have you ever heard a student at your school threaten to kill someone, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
4/25/99 Teen	32	67	1

11a. (IF HEARD THREAT/S) How many times have you heard such a thing - once, two or three times, four or five times, or more than that?

	Once	2-3	4 or 5	More than that	No opin.
4/25/99 Teen	22	43	12	23	-

11b. (IF HEARD THREAT/S) Did you take (it/them) seriously, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
4/25/99 Teen	27	72	1

11c. (IF HEARD THREAT/S) Did you report (it/them) to a teacher or some other adult, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
4/25/99 Teen	22	78	0

12. Has anyone at your high school ever threatened to kill you, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
4/25/99 Teen	5	95	0

13. At your school, do you often feel like an outcast, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
4/25/99 Teen	7	92	*

14. Are there any students in your school who you would consider to be neo-Nazis or skinheads, or not?

	Yes	No	No opin.
4/25/99 Teen	21	77	2
4/25/99 Parent	13	72	15

14a. (IF YES) Do you think neo-Nazis or skinheads in your school are more prone to violence than other students, less prone to violence, or about the same?

	More	Less	Same	No opinion
4/25/99 Teen	38	2	59	1

15. How difficult or easy do you think it would be for you to get a gun?

	-----Easy-----			---Difficult---			Have gun	No
	NET	Very	Smwht	NET	Smwht	Very	(vol.)	opin
4/25/99 Teen	54	31	23	45	23	22	0	1
4/25/99 Parent	48	28	20	49	28	21	1	3

16. How difficult or easy do you think it would be for you to get information on how to make a bomb?

	-----Easy-----			---Difficult---			No
	NET	Very	Smwht	NET	Smwht	Very	opin
4/25/99 Teen	67	44	23	32	16	17	*
4/25/99 Parent	79	57	22	19	8	11	2

17. Do you or does anyone in your house own a gun?

	Yes	No	No opinion
4/25/99 Teen	47	52	1
4/25/99 Parent	52	48	0

END