

## Your importance

The FBI Behavioral Threat Assessment research has found that peers of mass shooters are often aware of information that can help to prevent a school shooting.

Friends and acquaintances are some of the most common bystanders to potential active shooters. Bystanders are people who may learn of concerning activities by someone thinking about committing an act of targeted violence.

Research has found that peers were often aware of the attacker's attempts to obtain the weapons, ammunition or gear for an attack. They were also often aware of the attacker's violent plans.

While friends and peers see the most concerning behaviors prior to an attack, they also are the most hesitant to tell someone about their concerns.

One close friend of a well-known active shooter told BAU, **“When you know something is wrong but you don’t want to say it [...] Talk to someone about it. Report it. Even if they’re your friends, brother family; don’t let that hold you back from doing the right thing.”**

The FBI BAU’s Behavioral Threat Assessment Center (BTAC) is the U.S. Government’s multi-agency, multidisciplinary task force focused on the prevention of terrorism and targeted violence. Studies cited in this guide are available free online at [www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov)



## Lessons learned

Studies conducted by the FBI Behavioral Analysis Unit have identified key lessons from prior active shooter incidents:

**MASS SHOOTERS DON’T SNAP.** They spend time planning and preparing for their attacks, which offers opportunities for prevention. Prior to most active shooter incidents, bystanders observed multiple behaviors that caused them to become concerned.

**THE “ANGRY LONER” IS A MYTH.** Mass shooters have significant in person and online social interactions.

People are much more likely to become mass shooters if a **bystander does nothing** after observing worrisome behavior, suggesting that individuals may see bystander inaction as “permission” to act violently.

In order to “successfully” carry out an attack, the person must conceal their intentions from others. They may hide their true intentions when confronted. You will never have the complete picture, but you may be holding a key piece of information that can keep others safe.



For more information,  
visit our website  
[www.fbi.gov/prevent](http://www.fbi.gov/prevent)



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# Prevent Mass Violence

How to spot signs of **targeted**  
violence in schools - and get help.





# Common themes

## Suicidal thinking

Active shooters think of killing themselves more than the average population does. Many of those who commit mass violence consider killing or harming themselves before their attack. Thoughts about suicide are often accompanied by feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, or like there is no other option. Any statement or indication that someone wants to hurt themselves or others should be taken seriously.

## Unintentional Communications

Many people unintentionally communicate their plans for violence, including their thoughts about harming themselves or others. Often, these communications are discounted as jokes or fantasy, but they are key to understanding a person's obsessive violent thoughts and plans.

Behavioral Threat Assessment research found most juvenile active shooters and many adults made statements (verbal, written or online) about committing violence prior to their attack. These statements were **not necessarily** direct threats of violence.

# What to See

**No one behavior** means someone will commit violence, but these behaviors may indicate a person is moving towards violence.

## Common concerning behaviors are:

Significantly reduced ability to cope with stress or setbacks.

Seeing violence as the only way to solve their problems.

Disclosure or jokes about violent plans, whether verbal, written or online.

Repeated or detailed fantasies about violence.

Increasingly troublesome or concerning interactions with others.

Angry outbursts or physical aggression.

Behavior that makes other people worried.

Reduced interest in hobbies and other activities; worsening performance at school.

Obsessive or troubling interest in prior attackers or attacks.

Obsessive or troubling interest in obtaining firearms, other weapons, tactical gear, clothing, and/or military paraphernalia.

Creation of a manifesto, video, suicide note or other item meant to explain or claim credit for an act of violence.

Asking questions about or testing security at a possible target. For example, visiting school grounds after hours or while suspended.

# What to Do

If you are concerned, **talk about your concerns with someone you respect.** Share what you know and discuss your options. Your school or district may have established ways to report concerns.

If you decide to contact law enforcement, you may contact your:

**LOCAL POLICE OFFICE.** Call your local police department on the phone or walk in to report your concerns in person.

**LOCAL FBI OFFICE.** Report your concerns to the FBI by visiting [tips.fbi.gov](https://tips.fbi.gov), calling 1-800-CALL-FBI, or visiting your local FBI office.

Research shows that some peers attempt to address their concerns with the attacker directly. They also discuss their concerns with other friends.

However, peers are the least likely group of bystanders to report their concerns to an authority figure.

If you are an authority figure, keep in mind that it is rare for peers to be willing to come forward with their concerns.

**Therefore, it is important to take these reports seriously.**

