

POTENTIAL WARNING SIGNS OF TROUBLED CHILDREN

A Handout for Parents of Pre-teens or Teenagers

Research has shown that parents and schools working together can identify and get help for children in need of intervention. Recognizing potential warning signs may also prevent future violence from occurring. Perpetrators of school violence during the past decade have shown warning signs over time. If your child shows any of the signs listed below, discuss your concerns with a trained professional who can suggest ways to prevent future violent behavior. Your school mental health team and/or counselors are good resources to access if you have concerns. It is important to note that one isolated sign does not necessarily mean your child will conduct a violent act; however, a pattern of escalating behaviors in conjunction with multiple warning signs may suggest your child needs additional help and support.

Warning Signs:

- has trouble paying attention and concentrating
- consistently does not listen to authority figures
- pays no attention to the feelings or rights of others
- reacts to disappointments, criticism, or teasing with extreme and intense anger, blame, or revenge
- watches many violent television shows and movies or plays a lot of violent games
- has few friends, and is often rejected by other children because of his or her behavior
- withdraws socially
- has excessive feelings of isolation and being alone
- makes friends with other children known to be unruly or aggressive
- mistreats people and seems to rely on physical violence or threats of violence to solve problems (intimidating and bullying behaviors)
- often expresses the feeling that life has treated him or her unfairly (feelings of being picked on or persecuted)
- does poorly in school and often skips class
- gets suspended from or drops out of school
- joins a gang, gets involved in fighting (impulsive and chronic hitting), stealing, or destroying property
- exhibits uncontrolled anger
- expresses violence in writings and/or drawings
- has a past history of violent and aggressive behavior
- makes suicidal comments or attempts
- exhibits self-harm behavior (cutting, scratching, burning, hitting, etc.)
- is cruel or violent toward pets or other animals
- is a victim of violence and/or abuse
- drinks alcohol and/or uses inhalants or drugs
- shows intolerance for differences and prejudicial attitudes
- has inappropriate access to, possession of, and/or use of firearms

This material was excerpted from two sources: 1) A brochure produced through a collaborative project with the American Psychological Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, 2) US Department of Education (1998). *Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools*. Washington, DC: US Department of Education.