



Schools, parents urged to heed threats

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A child threatens a classmate in the school cafeteria. Another speaks about violence, or refers to weapons.

How seriously should parents and principals take such talk? When should adults act?

Experts say schools and families need to pay attention to any threats and consider the risk factors of the child who makes them.

"We don't exactly know what combination of risk factors will accurately predict violence," said Demy Kamboukos, director of research at the Institute for Trauma and Resilience at New York University's Child Study Center. "But if any kid is sort of fascinated with violence and communicates it in any form, writing and drawing, acting it out, we know to stop and listen."

Kamboukos said factors to pay attention to include mental health difficulties, violent behaviors, gang associations, discipline problems, and a history of bullying or being bullied.

"The research does show that teenagers who feel rejected, who feel bullied, who feel alone, who feel disrespected, are at risk for committing violent acts," she said.

Those who study adolescence said they don't yet know enough details about the arrest of two students from Connetquot High School in Bohemia to know whether their massacre plan was credible. Still, they said that the discovery of a diary with names of intended victims is a chilling reminder of the Columbine school slayings in 1999 and is cause for adults' concerns.

"Since Columbine, nobody takes any chances any more," said Dan Kindlon, who teaches psychology at Harvard University and is the co-author of "Raising Cain," a book about boys. "If you find a diary with stuff written out, I think you do have to take it seriously."

When Cecile Wren read the news from Bohemia yesterday, she said she felt queasy. A former Jericho Middle School principal, Wren has been consulting with schools about giving students social and emotional educations as well as lessons in standard subjects.

"We tend to always worry about how we're going to educate children academically," she said.

"We need to change the fabric of the school community to educate children by also having a counseling component as part of their lives. It should be at the forefront of everything we do."

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