

## ***Early Detection & Intervention: Tips to Prevent Violence<sup>1</sup>***

While no one wants to think about violent acts, it is imperative that each of us educate ourselves on the early warning signs of targeted violence. Through research conducted on school shooters, Dr. Peter Langman offers guidance regarding lessons learned from past violent acts at schools. Several of his tips are discussed below:

- **Know your students.** Talk to your students. The best way to know if a person's behavior is unusual is to get a baseline. Use students' names. Learn about them. Develop a relationship. Ensure you are present in online course bulletin boards and physically engaged in spaces on campus. We are often the most afraid of those who we know the least.
- **Do not lie or withhold information to protect a student.** Share information when you have a concern. Be proactive about referrals, and respond quickly if contacted by the police or HEAT. Do not cover up for a student if you are asked about their actions. Both HEAT and Harper Police have a legitimate interest in any information that will help them evaluate a possible threat.
- **Allow the process to occur.** Harper College has a process outlined to ensure that individuals are treated fairly and given appropriate opportunities to be heard. Do not attempt to avoid the process or seek special treatment for your student. In addition, if you are given suggestions from HEAT, try to comply with those. You may be asked to have a conversation with a student that doesn't feel comfortable, but remember there is a difference between discomfort and actual fear of violence.
- **If the College is concerned, pay attention.** You may feel that a person would never engage in such behavior and/or be capable of violence. However, concerns rarely arise out of nowhere. Violent acts are always committed by someone's friend, someone's son or daughter. If a person exhibits a warning sign behavior, refer that to the HEAT for review.
- **Assume threats are serious until proven otherwise.** If someone makes a threat, even in a joking matter, take it seriously until it is proven not to be. This includes references on Facebook or Twitter. Ensure that your students know how to report possible concerns, and don't ignore it when they do.
- **Anyone can stop a school shooting.** Langman provides the example of a gun dealer who stopped a possible attack by reporting a customer that seemed desperate. He also shares the example of an individual who found a notebook in a parking lot, and this was traced back to individuals who had a planned attack. It is even harder to identify and report such behaviors in those that are closest to us, but we have this responsibility to ourselves, to them, and to our communities. This is true especially for students who will often be the ones to see or experience the warning signs before an attack occurs. Make sure your students know how to report concerns.
- **Recognize possible rehearsals of attacks.** It is common for individuals to practice or rehearse an attack. This can occur in many formats – discussion, video, written account, drawings, etc. While there is not a magical formula to assess whether a college report about a violent incident is a precursor to violence, there are some possible indicators. For example, if a fictional narrative contains content indicating that the author identifies with the violent actor and/or contains reference to other known individuals as victims, this is more concerning than a factual report about an incident that occurred in the past. Any such account warrants an investigation, and may or may not result in a determination of a threat.
- **Physical security has limitations.** Langman describes common security measures that are in place in school settings – identification badges for campus community members, metal detectors, and surveillance cameras – that do not truly prevent school shootings. ***The best kind of security is early detection, which occurs most effectively as a result of our relationships with each other, rather than as a barriers or attempts to keep people out.***

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *Why Kids Kill: Inside the Minds of School Shooters* (Langman, 2009, pp. 177-188)