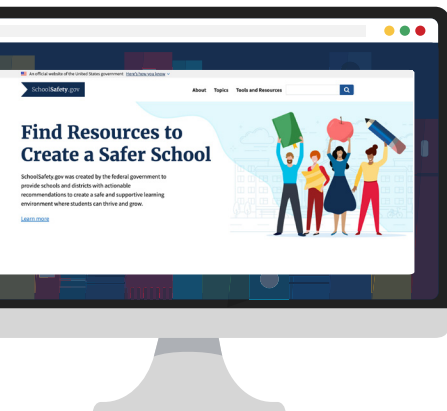


# Back-to-School Resources

## Create safe and supportive environments for students and educators returning for a new school year.

Back-to-school season represents the start of a new academic year and a time of excitement and anticipation for the kindergarten through grade 12 (K-12) community. It's also an important reminder of the continuous need to create and maintain safe and supportive environments for students and educators.

School safety encompasses several important elements, which span planning and prevention activities to protection and mitigation measures, to response and recovery actions during and after an actual incident. By integrating these various elements – and applying them to their individualized and unique needs, challenges, and settings – schools can create comprehensive and holistic school safety plans, procedures, and systems.



[SchoolSafety.gov](https://www.schoolsafety.gov) provides one-stop access to resources and evidence-based practices on a range of school safety topics and threats. **Visit the site to inform and enhance your school safety programs and activities** in preparation for and during the back-to-school season and beyond.

## Key school safety issues and strategies to support a safe back-to-school season include:



### Bullying and Cyberbullying

Bullying is defined as unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived imbalance of power. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Bullying is linked to many negative outcomes and in some instances can play a contributing role in school violence. Reducing bullying in schools requires a multi-faceted approach, including identification, prevention, immediate response, and appropriate support for serious incidents, as well as attention to cyberbullying and online harassment, including gender-based harassment and violence. School-based programs that strengthen students' skills; build a positive and supportive school climate; modify the physical and social environment, including through guidance on appropriate, respectful engagement online and through the use of electronic devices; and engage parents and youth can also play a part in preventing bullying and/or reducing key risk factors.





## Child Exploitation

Child exploitation can affect youth of any age, race, geographic location, or socioeconomic status, and victimization can take place directly on school grounds as well as through online or social media platforms, which can be sites for predatory behaviors and interactions with malicious actors who target children and adolescents (e.g., adults seeking to sexually exploit children, to financially extort them through the threat or actual distribution of intimate images). To prevent and address child exploitation, school leaders can provide training and resources on the risk factors and indicators of child exploitation so that teachers and school staff can recognize potential cases, as well as offer age-appropriate safety education programs for students and engage with parents to raise awareness of the issue. School districts should also establish and articulate clearly defined policies, protocols, and procedures, supported by collaboration with relevant local community and law enforcement partners, for school personnel to follow if cases of child exploitation are suspected or disclosed, as well as put in place campus security measures and screen visitors to school grounds and events.



## Cybersecurity

All educational institutions are at risk of falling victim to a cyberattack, and in recent years, K-12 schools have been an increasingly frequent target. These attacks can impact a school's ability to carry out its educational obligations, protect sensitive student and staff data, and provide secure learning environments. School districts can take a number of steps and actions to better protect against cybersecurity risks. These include investing in impactful security measures, such as enabling multi-factor authentication and installing software updates, as well as implementing a cybersecurity awareness and training program to educate students and staff on the ways to recognize and report suspicious activity.



## Emergency Planning

Schools must be prepared to face a range of emergency events, including natural disasters, crime-related incidents, and accidents. Emergency planning is a key component of school safety that can include large-scale actions or everyday activities that help build a safe school environment. Elements of emergency planning include creating a comprehensive school Emergency Operations Plan (EOP), holding tabletop exercises to test procedures and protocols, and conducting developmentally appropriate drills so that all members of the school community can practice the actions they would take before, during, and after an emergency. Schools should also have planning teams in place that include a wide range of school personnel and community partners and first responders, and review, evaluate, and update school EOPs on a regular basis.



## Infectious Diseases and Public Health

Schools can face challenges to sustaining safe and healthy in-person learning due to potential outbreaks of infectious diseases. While outbreaks and other public health concerns may be unpredictable, K-12 schools should put in place a core set of prevention strategies as part of their normal operations. These include teaching and reinforcing proper hand hygiene, cleaning and disinfecting surfaces, optimizing ventilation and maintaining improvements to indoor air quality, promoting equitable access to vaccinations, and encouraging students and staff to stay home when they are sick. School and district administrators should also work with local health officials to consider other local conditions and factors when deciding to implement prevention strategies.



## Mental Health

Students often come to school with complex physical and mental health concerns or social service needs. Schools are critical partners in supporting the mental health and well-being of students and should create a positive, safe, and affirming learning environment. To help address youth mental health issues and challenges, schools can provide training to staff on how to recognize signs of changes in mental health and behavior and take appropriate action if needed; implement evidence-based practices within a Multi-Tiered System of Supports framework; provide access to school-based mental health services and programs; promote school connectedness; and adopt a school-wide trauma-informed or sensitive approach.





## School Climate

School climate is a broad, multifaceted concept that involves many aspects of the student’s educational experience. A positive school climate reflects attention to fostering social and physical safety and encouraging and maintaining respectful, trusting, and caring relationships throughout the school community. Schools and districts should implement social, emotional, and behavioral support systems to create a climate that supports and responds to student behavior and well-being needs. School leaders can support student character development practices in the classroom and school, as well as through collaborating with families and community organizations. Additional strategies to consider include conducting a school climate survey and identifying and implementing measures and programs that are best suited for the school.



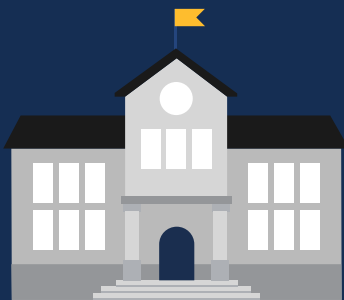
## Targeted Violence

Targeted violence refers to violence that is premeditated and directed at specific individuals, groups, or locations. It is distinct from violence that is spontaneous, random, or impulsive, and is often distinguished by pre-attack behaviors that suggest violence as a possible outcome. Schools can actively work to address the threat of targeted violence through a variety of prevention, intervention, protection, and mitigation measures, and provide resources and support after an incident to restore safety, security, and a positive environment for students and educators. Specific strategies schools can consider as part of their targeted violence prevention efforts include fostering a positive school climate, intervening to lessen harms and prevent future risk, and implementing physical safety and security measures.



## Threat Assessment and Reporting

Identifying, reporting, and addressing concerning student behaviors and other suspicious activities can help stop violence before it occurs. One practice schools may consider is the use of well-trained and diverse multidisciplinary school threat assessment teams. These teams should include certified mental health professionals and the approach should include providing the supports and interventions students need when they need them. Schools may also establish a reporting system that is continually monitored and allows anonymous reporting to help members of the school community provide information on concerning behaviors or suspicious activities.



**A holistic and community-based approach to school safety can empower everyone to take action and play a role in creating safer schools and communities.**

Learn more about these issues and find related resources on [SchoolSafety.gov](https://www.schoolsafety.gov). Each school safety topic has a dedicated sub-page on the site that includes evidence-based practices and recommendations in the form of resources, guidance, tools, and strategies.

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