Our Proven Programs Create Change
That Leads to Safer Schools

Prevent violence before it starts.

Sandy Hook Promise’s Know the Signs gun violence prevention programs teach youth and adults how to identify, intervene, and get help for individuals at-risk of harming themselves or others. This guide provides an overview of the warning signs of violence and what to do when you see them. Additionally, it explains how to bring our Know the Signs programs to your school or youth organization at no cost. When we “know the signs,” we can protect more children from violence.

About Sandy Hook Promise

Sandy Hook Promise (SHP) is a national nonprofit organization with a mission to end school shootings and create a culture change that prevents violence and other harmful acts that hurt children. Through its life-saving, evidence-informed Know the Signs prevention programs, SHP educates and empowers youth and adults to recognize, intervene, and get help for individuals who may be socially isolated and/or at risk of hurting themselves or others. Through nonpartisan policy and partnerships, SHP advances gun safety, youth mental health, and violence prevention education at the state and federal levels that protect all children from gun violence in their schools, homes, and communities. SHP is led by several family members whose loved ones were killed in the tragic mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School on December 14, 2012.

For more information about Sandy Hook Promise and our Know the Signs programs, please visit www.sandyhookpromise.org. To learn how to bring our programs to your school or community, please email us at programs@sandyhookpromise.org.

Gun violence is preventable when you Know the Signs. Learn how to stop violence before it starts.
When you don’t know what to look for, it can be easy to miss signs, or dismiss them as unimportant, sometimes with tragic consequences. It’s important to know that one warning sign on its own does not mean a person is planning an act of violence. But when many connected or cumulative signs are observed over a period of time, it could mean that the person is heading down a pathway towards violence or self-harm. By knowing the signs, you have the power to intervene and get help for that person. Your actions can save lives.

Additional Warning Signs:

If you observe multiple warning signs or even one clear threat, please take it seriously and act immediately. Talk to a trusted adult like a teacher, school official or mental health professional. In the event of a life-threatening emergency, immediately call 911. Though this list may not include every possible warning sign, here are some of the most common observable signs:

**Mental illness and/or behavioral shifts:**
- Diagnosed or undiagnosed mental illness (leading contributor to self-harm)
- Previous suicide attempts, ideation, self-harm (leading indicators to self-harm)
- Major change in eating or sleeping habits
- Feelings of hopelessness, guilt or worthlessness (leading indicator to self-harm)
- Drop in quality of school work, extracurricular activities
- Dramatic changes in physical appearance
- Giving away possessions (leading indicator to self-harm)
- Substance use or adverse childhood experiences (traumas)

**Antisocial behavior:**
- Negative role models or peer groups
- Dishonesty, antisocial beliefs and hostility toward authority figures
- Lack discipline — repeatedly failed to follow rules
- Severity of destruction of property
- Intolerance for differences in others, prejudiced attitudes
- Access/use and prevalence of drugs and alcohol/ substance abuse

**Threatening behavior:**
- Bringing a weapon into school
- Making overt threats of violence (spoken, written word or gestures) are signs that should not be ignored.
- Threatening others or making overt threats of violence towards others may be a sign of someone who cannot self-regulate their emotions or control their anger.
- Extreme feelings of isolation or social withdrawal due to real or perceived actions of others can lead to further withdrawal from society.
- Deterioration of school performance, changes in peer groups
- Drop in academic or behavioral performance (leading indicator to self-harm)
- Dramatic changes or withdrawal from social or athletic activities
- Significant personality change
- Feelings of hopelessness, guilt or worthlessness
- Feelings of despair and hopelessness
- Previous suicide attempts, ideation, self-harm
- Diagnosed or undiagnosed mental illness
- Access/use and prevalence of drugs and alcohol/substance abuse

**Chronic social isolation:**
- Victim of constant social rejection or marginalization
- Difficulty making or maintaining friends
- Harassing or tormenting others
- Enacting cyberbullying
- Social isolation or withdrawal over a period of time
- Ofting or passing time alone
- Extreme feelings of isolation or social withdrawal due to real or perceived actions of others can lead to further withdrawal from society.

**Making overt threats of violence (spoken, written word or gestures) are signs that should not be ignored.**

**Warning signs:**
- Lack of coping, anger management and/or conflict management skills
- Making overt threats of violence, in pictures, videos, spoken or written word
- Committing acts/multiple offenses, even if at a young age (<10)
- Patterns of impulsive behavior and/or chronic self-harm
- Regularly using intimidation or bullying behaviors
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- Perpetration of self-harm or violence towards others made in a manner harmful to self or others. This may result in real or perceived feelings of being picked on or persecuted by others.
- Extremes feelings of isolation or social withdrawal due to real or perceived actions of others can lead to further withdrawal from society.

**Unsupervised, illegal and/or easy access to firearms, or bragging about access to firearms, can be a warning sign.**

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