To: Education Committee, Vermont House of Representatives

From: Robert S. Bliss, Assistant Superintendent of Schools

Date: March 21, 2018

Re: Testimony on School Safety

How to make schools safer:

1. "Don't harden schools. Make them softer, by improving **social and emotional health.**"(1)(4)
2. Take a **public health view**, not a protection view, not a "gun control view." (2)(3)(4)
3. Focus on **prevention**, not reaction. (3)(5)

In the wake of the Parkland, FLA murders on February 14, 2018 and the near miss at Fair Haven Union High School the attention of our country and the state of Vermont turned, heavily, toward a cry for help and change. The students who survived Parkland and others across the U.S. and Vermont have left adults and educators, like me, feeling shamed and inspired, and wondering where we have been for the 130 school shootings since Columbine.

A focus on school safety is good. Make no mistake, we all want our schools to be safe. However, this is not an issue of just school safety. It is a much larger issue of public health. Viewing the issue from the public health point of view will not only make schools safer, it will make our communities, state, and country safer.

In "Call for Action to Prevent Gun Violence in the United States of America," an effort supported by over 200 universities, national education and mental health groups, and more than 2300 individual experts, the path to safer communities is spelled out.(1) (3) Their work supports and echoes the synthesis done by Nicholas Kristoff. (2) His work followed the Las Vegas mass shooting. It's no mistake that scholars and public health officials continue to point to the same key factors in turning the corner on what has become a "normal" occurrence in American life. Here are the key points:

"On the first level we need:

1.   A national requirement for all schools to assess school climate and maintain physically and emotionally safe conditions and positive school environments that protect all students and adults from bullying, discrimination, harassment, and assault;

2.   A ban on assault-style weapons, high-capacity ammunition clips, and products that modify semi-automatic firearms to enable them to function like automatic firearms.

On the second level we need:

3.   Adequate staffing (such as counselors, psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers) of coordinated school- and community-based mental health services for individuals with risk factors for violence, recognizing that violence is not intrinsically a product of mental illness;

4.   Reform of school discipline to reduce exclusionary practices and foster positive social, behavioral, emotional, and academic success for students;

5.   Universal background checks to screen out violent offenders, persons who have been hospitalized for violence towards self or others, and persons on no-fly, terrorist watch lists.

On the third level we need:

6.   A national program to train and maintain school- and community-based threat assessment teams that include mental health and law enforcement partners. Threat assessment programs should include practical channels of communication for persons to report potential threats as well as interventions to resolve conflicts and assist troubled individuals;

7.   Removal of legal barriers to sharing safety-related information among educational, mental health, and law enforcement agencies in cases where a person has threatened violence;

8.   Laws establishing Gun Violence Protection Orders that allow courts to issue time-limited restraining orders requiring that firearms be recovered by law enforcement when there is evidence that an individual is planning to carry out acts against others or against themselves." (3)

These can and should be put into play nationally, but we should take action on a state level to lead the way.

From a school's view, we can take action on points 1, 3, 4, and 6. First, we are currently required to assess and address school climate and the impediments to a healthy community articulated in #1, above. This isn't an easy task, and events like the murders in Parkland and the near miss in Fair Haven intensify the focus. This is constant work. Policies, programs, outreach, collaboration, and community are all part of the effort. Rutland's Project Vision is a great example.

Second, we make every effort to have "adequate" staffing of counselors, psychologists, mental health case managers, and mentors. The truth is, we are taxed beyond our capacity. Even when we connect with community resources, we can be overwhelmed on a daily basis. We could use some help incenting professionals in these disciplines to earn their degrees, come to Vermont, and stay. Specifically, we need to be able to pay more and be supported when we do it.

Third, reducing exclusionary discipline practices is our goal. We are hampered by the issues noted in the above paragraph. It's hard to keep kids in school and help them gain

skills when we lack the support they need. This is not an issue of secondary education, it's an issue in our elementary schools. When 5 to 11 year olds disrupt schools, and then are sent home, it becomes their goal to get home. It does not become their goal to stay in school. Please understand, creating more parallel environments is not our goal. It would be best if we could allow all students to remain in the school setting and build skills with the support of master level professionals. Suspension and expulsion are not effective ways to change behavior and learn skills. Restorative and instructive methods will work better.

Finally, Threat assessment is one of the unfortunate school based necessities that has fallen out of the school shooting era. We've done assessment of individual student and their potential for self-harm forever. Now, we also have a team and process for assessing threats to school and public safety. The team approach we use is collaborative with local agencies and is adopted from the Vermont School Crisis Guide. (5)

We need to support of our entire state community and legislative body to be successful at the school level. We always have needed that support. Now, more than ever, working closely with our community partners, advocating for action, and taking action is what we need to do.

Items 2, 5, 7, and 8 are matters of state and national law and policy. I hear from teaches, parents, and community members every day that we need your help in creating a safer Vermont. Please take action on those steps now.

Stories:
1. "The only thing that stops a serious threat is information."
2. "Our dress code is tougher than our gun laws." ~ RMS student
3. "It's so big and comprehensive. We all have something to lose. This is about kids living their lives in fear. By the time they get to me (grade 6), there's so much damage done. This isn't about fear of school. They are lost and forgotten." ~ RIS teacher.
4. "Threat assessment is a daily event." ~ RCPS Administrator, describing that every day in or district we assess students for self-harm, threats to others, and their own safety.
5. Shortage of counseling and mental health professionals.

Resources:
1. "Here's How to Prevent the Next School Shooting, Experts Say." Kamanetz, Anya, 3/7/18.
2. "How to Reduce Shootings." Kristoff, Nicholas 2/20/18.
3. "Call for Action to Prevent Gun Violence in the United States of America." Curry School of Education, 2/28/18.
4. "Understanding Mental Health's Role in Relation to the School Violence Discussion." Vermont Department of Mental Health, 3/14/18.
5. Vermont School Crisis Guide. http://schoolsafety.vermont.gov/planning/vermont-school-crisis-guide

npred

Vermont Public Radio

K-I2

Here's How To Prevent The Next School Shooting, Experts Say

March 7, 2018 · 6:05 AM ET

ANYA KAMENETZ

LA Johnson/NPR

After Parkland, there have been many calls to make schools a "harder target" — for example, by arming teachers. But there's a decent amount of research out there on

what actually makes schools safer, and most of it doesn't point to more guns.

On the Friday after the deadly shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida, Matthew Mayer, a professor at the Rutgers Graduate School of Education, got an email during a faculty meeting.

The email was from Shane Jimerson, a professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Both specialize in the study of school violence.

That email led to nearly two weeks of long days, Mayer says, for some of the leading experts in the field. On conference calls and in Google docs they shaped a concise, eight-point "Call for Action To Prevent Gun Violence In The United States of America."

About 200 universities, national education and mental health groups, school districts, and more than 2,300 individual experts have signed on to support this document in the weeks since.

Their topline message: Don't harden schools. Make them softer, by improving social and emotional health.

"If we're really talking about prevention, my perspective is that we should go for the public health approach," says Ron Avi Astor at the University of Southern California, who also helped draft the plan.

A public health approach to disease means, instead of waiting for people to be rushed to emergency rooms with heart attacks or the flu, you go into the community: with

vaccinations, screenings, fruits and vegetables, walking trails and exercise coaches. You screen and regulate environmental hazards, like a nearby polluting factory. You keep watch on reported cases of illness, to stop a new outbreak in its tracks.

A public health approach to school shootings, Astor explains, would be much along the same lines.

Instead of waiting for people to, again, be rushed into emergency rooms, you go into the community with preventive resources. You do your best to lower the background levels of bullying and discrimination. You track the data and perform what is called "threat assessments" on potential risks.

And, these experts say, you remove the major "environmental hazard" that contributes to gun violence: the guns. The eight-point plan calls for universal background checks, a ban on assault-style weapons, and something called Gun Violence Protection Orders: a type of emergency order that would allow police to seize a gun when there is an imminent threat.

What sets this call to action apart from other policy proposals is not gun control, however, but the research-based approach to violence prevention and response. This is a long haul, say the experts, not a quick fix.

"No matter what you try to do by just hardening the target, we've learned that having the armed officers isn't necessarily going to stop it," says Matthew Mayer at Rutgers. "Having the metal detector or the locked doors isn't going to stop it. The hard work is a lot more effort. You'd better start thinking in a more comprehensive manner about prevention instead of reacting."

Prevention: The first step

School climate may sound fuzzy or abstract. It means the quality of relationships among the students and the adults in a school. It's affected by the school's approach to discipline and behavior, the availability of professionals like counselors and social workers, as well as any social-emotional curriculum taught in the classroom.

School climate, in turn, affects students' mental and emotional health and academic success. And research by Astor and others has consistently found key factors that can make schools safer: cultivate social and emotional health, connect to community resources and respond, particularly, to troubled students.

Why does this matter? Well, for one thing, the very kids who bring weapons to school are more likely to report being bullied or threatened themselves. They may be fearful of gang violence and feel a need to protect themselves on the way back and forth to school.

Or, they may be individually ostracized and aggrieved. This is true not just in the United States, says Astor, but in "Kosovo, Canada, Chile, Israel, the kids who bring weapons to school are reporting tons of victimization."

So, if you devote resources to shutting down bullying, discrimination and harassment, there is a chance to de-escalate conflict before it starts.

And research shows that school climate measures really work. In fact, there has been a steady downward trend in bullying and harassment over the past decade, which

Catherine Bradshaw at the University of Virginia attributes in part to evidence-based social and emotional measures.

The witnesses

There is a second reason a better school climate can cut down on violence. It's what Astor refers to as the role of the witness.

He again cites the example of California, which does a comprehensive annual survey. There, 20 to 30 percent of students above the elementary level consistently report seeing a weapon of some kind at school at least once during the year. That's conservatively more than half a *million* students, just in that one state.

Moreover, based on the survey, at least 125,000 of these students in California were actually threatened or injured by a weapon on school grounds. This includes things like knives and nunchuks as well as guns.

But what happens next?

If that witness, or that victim, has a strong relationship with an adult, they are more likely to report being menaced by a weapon. Whereas, if there is what Astor calls a "no snitching culture" in the school, or the witness fears for their safety, nothing will be done.

He says he's not urging schools to punish or expel the kid who brought the weapon, but, instead, to use "education as an intervention."

This approach is applicable not only for mass shootings, he says, but for violence that arises from disputes between students or when gang violence in the community spills onto school grounds.

And, he says preventing gun violence also means looking at suicide. Suicide is just behind homicide as a leading cause of death for teenagers. When a weapon comes to school, self-harm may be the plan, and a school-climate approach addresses that threat as well.

The researchers' policy plan calls for assessing school climate nationwide; reducing "exclusionary practices" like suspension and expulsion; maintaining physically and emotionally safe schools; and staffing up with specialists like counselors, psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers, both in the school and in the community.

Emergency mode

While school climate is an ongoing background effort, the public health approach has an emergency mode when it comes to violence. It kicks in when someone does report a person bringing a weapon to school or talking about violence. It's called a "threat assessment."

After the Columbine shooting in 1999, the FBI and the Secret Service each conducted studies of school shootings and shared their knowledge with the nation's educators. They found that there was no one "profile" of a school shooter. But, almost all students who committed homicide had told someone of their intentions.

So, the two law enforcement agencies recommended that schools copy what the Secret Service does when someone makes a threat on a government official. Threat assessment has been required by law in Virginia's schools since 2013, and adopted in many other places.

A threat assessment team consists of the principal, school counselor, school psychologist and a school-based police officer. They talk to the people involved and any witnesses. They try to figure out if the threat is serious: Is it specific? Is there a detailed plan? Is there a weapon?

In a school, the next steps include notifying parents, taking steps to protect victims, and referrals to mental health and law enforcement if appropriate.

Threat assessments are not a fail-safe. A local ABC affiliate in Florida did report, based on school records, that a threat assessment was ordered for Parkland shooting suspect Nikolas Cruz, based on an incident that happened in January 2017, a year before the shooting.

But Dewey Cornell at the University of Virginia, another author of the Call to Action, says researchers have gathered good evidence to support the technique, when implemented fully as in Virginia. Among the positive impacts, he says, are "reduced suspensions and reduced bullying, students and teachers reporting that they feel safer, and students reporting a greater willingness to report threats of violence."

His research also shows that less than 1 percent of threats are ever carried out.

The researchers are hopeful that their Call to Action will break through the noise. But they've been here before, Mayer says. A group of his colleagues wrote something similar in 2012 after the shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School, and after a group of school shootings in 2006. Mayer hopes, this time, people will be paying attention.

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low to Reduce

70

hootings

By Nicholas Kristof

Graphics by Bill Marsh

UPDATED February 20, 2018

Inevitably, predictably, fatefully, another mass shooting breaks our hearts. This time, it was a school shooting in Florida on Wednesday that left at least 17 dead at the hands of 19-year-old gunman and his AR-15 semiautomatic rifle.

But what is perhaps most heartbreaking of all is that they shouldn't be shocking. People all over the world become furious and try to harm others, but only in the United States do we suffer such mass shootings so regularly; only in the United States do we lose one person every 15 minutes to gun violence.

WARNING
The following content may be disturbing for some viewers

Footage reportedly taken during the attack inside Majory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., on Wednesday. (Source: YouTube)

So let's not just mourn the dead, let's not just lower flags and make somber speeches. Let's also learn lessons from these tragedies, so that there can be fewer of them. In particular, I suggest that we try a new approach to reducing gun violence — a public health strategy. These graphics and much of this text are from a visual essay I did in November after a church shooting in Texas; sadly, the material will continue to be relevant until we not only grieve but also act.

This story was updated in February 2018. Visit this page to see the original.

America Has More Guns
Than Any Other Country

America Has More Guns
Than Any Other Country

The first step is to understand the scale of the challenge America faces: The U.S. has more than 300 million guns – roughly one for every citizen – and stands out as well for its gun death rates. At the other extreme, Japan has less than one gun per 100 people, and typically fewer than 10 gun deaths a year in the entire country.
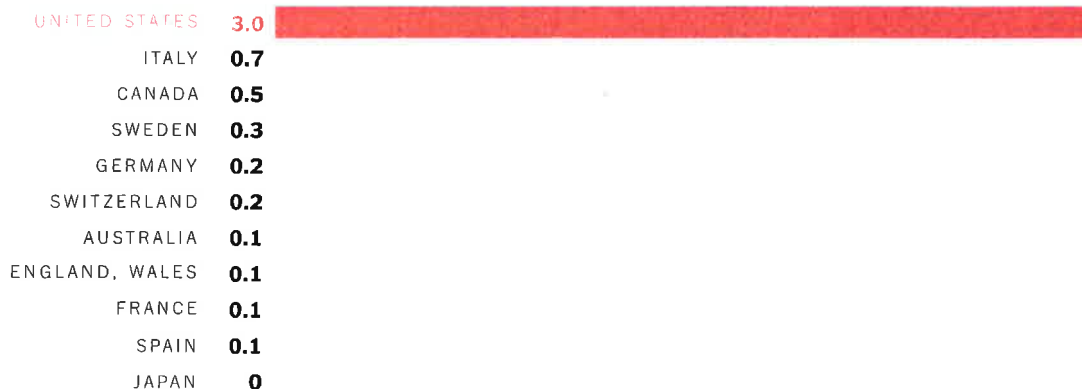
Guns per 100 people

The United States stands alone among developed countries: It has by far the highest rate of firearms ownership.

Country	Guns per 100 people
UNITED STATES	88.8
SWITZERLAND	45.7
SWEDEN	31.6
FRANCE	31.2
CANADA	30.8
GERMANY	30.3
AUSTRALIA	15.0
ITALY	11.9
SPAIN	10.4
ENGLAND, WALES	6.2
JAPAN	0.6

Gun murders per 100,000 people

America's private arsenal is six times as lethal as Canada's, and 30 times worse than Australia's.

Country	Gun murders per 100,000 people
UNITED STATES	3.0
ITALY	0.7
CANADA	0.5
SWEDEN	0.3
GERMANY	0.2
SWITZERLAND	0.2
AUSTRALIA	0.1
ENGLAND, WALES	0.1
FRANCE	0.1
SPAIN	0.1
JAPAN	0

The New York Times | Sources: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (gun murders); Small Arms Survey (guns per 100 people) | Murder data for U.S., Canada, Sweden, Switzerland, Australia and Spain from 2015 and latest available for other countries; 2007 data for guns per 100 people.

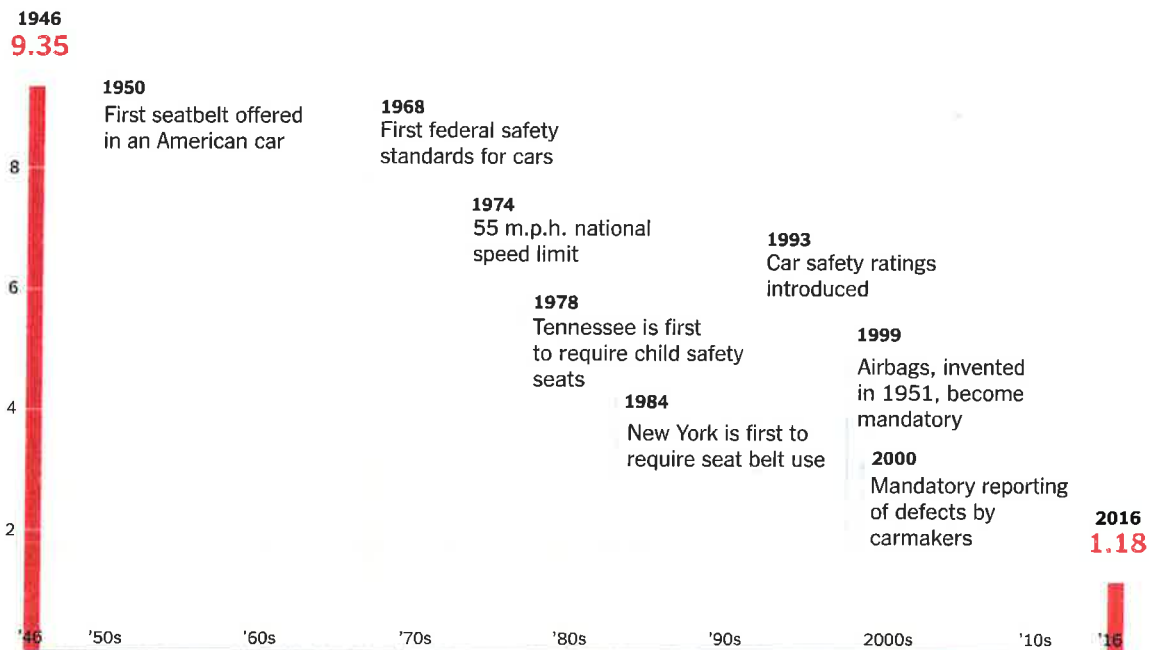# We Have a Model for
Regulating Guns: Automobiles

Gun enthusiasts often protest: Cars kill about as many people as guns, and

Gun enthusiasts often protest: Cars kill about as many people as guns, and we don't ban them! No, but automobiles are actually a model for the public health approach I'm suggesting.

We don't ban cars, but we work hard to regulate them – and limit access to them – so as to reduce the death toll they cause. This has been spectacularly successful, reducing the death rate per 100 million miles driven by 95 percent since 1921.

Take a look at the history of motor vehicle safety since World War II:

Deaths per 100 million vehicle miles traveled

1946
9.35

1950
First seatbelt offered in an American car

1968
First federal safety standards for cars

1974
55 m.p.h. national speed limit

1993
Car safety ratings introduced

1978
Tennessee is first to require child safety seats

1999
Airbags, invented in 1951, become mandatory

1984
New York is first to require seat belt use

2000
Mandatory reporting of defects by carmakers

2016
1.18

'46   '50s   '60s   '70s   '80s   '90s   2000s   '10s   '16

The New York Times | Source: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

The Liberal Approach Is Ineffective.
Use a Public Health Approach Instead.

Frankly, liberal opposition to guns has often been ineffective, and sometimes counterproductive. The 10-year ban on assault weapons accomplished little, partly because definitions were about cosmetic features like bayonet mounts (and partly because even before the ban, such guns were used in only 2 percent of crimes).

The left sometimes focuses on "gun control," which scares off gun owners and leads to more gun sales. A better framing is "gun safety" or "reducing gun violence," and using auto safety as a model—constant efforts to make

and leads to more gun sales. A better framing is "gun safety" or "reducing gun violence," and using auto safety as a model—constant efforts to make the products safer and to limit access by people who are most likely to misuse them.

What would a public health approach look like for guns if it were modeled after cars? It would include:

Background Checks
22 percent of guns are obtained without one.

Protection Orders
Keep men who are subject to domestic violence protection orders from having guns.

Ban Under-21s
A ban on people under 21 purchasing firearms (this is already the case in many states).

Safe Storage
These include trigger locks as well as guns and ammunition stored separately, especially when children are in the house.

Straw Purchases
Tighter enforcement of laws on straw purchases of weapons, and some limits on how many guns can be purchased in a month.

Ammunition Checks
Experimentation with a one-time background check for anybody buying ammunition.

End Immunity
End immunity for firearm companies. That's a subsidy to a particular industry.

Ban Bump Stocks
A ban on bump stocks of the kind used in Las Vegas to mimic automatic weapon fire.

Research 'Smart Guns'
"Smart guns" fire only after a fingerprint or PIN is entered, or if used near a particular bracelet.

If someone steals my iPhone, it's useless, and the same should be true of guns. Gun manufacturers made child-proof guns back in the 19th century (before dropping them), and it's time to advance that technology today. Some combination of smart guns and safe storage would also reduce the number of firearms stolen in the U.S. each year, now about 200,000, and available to criminals.
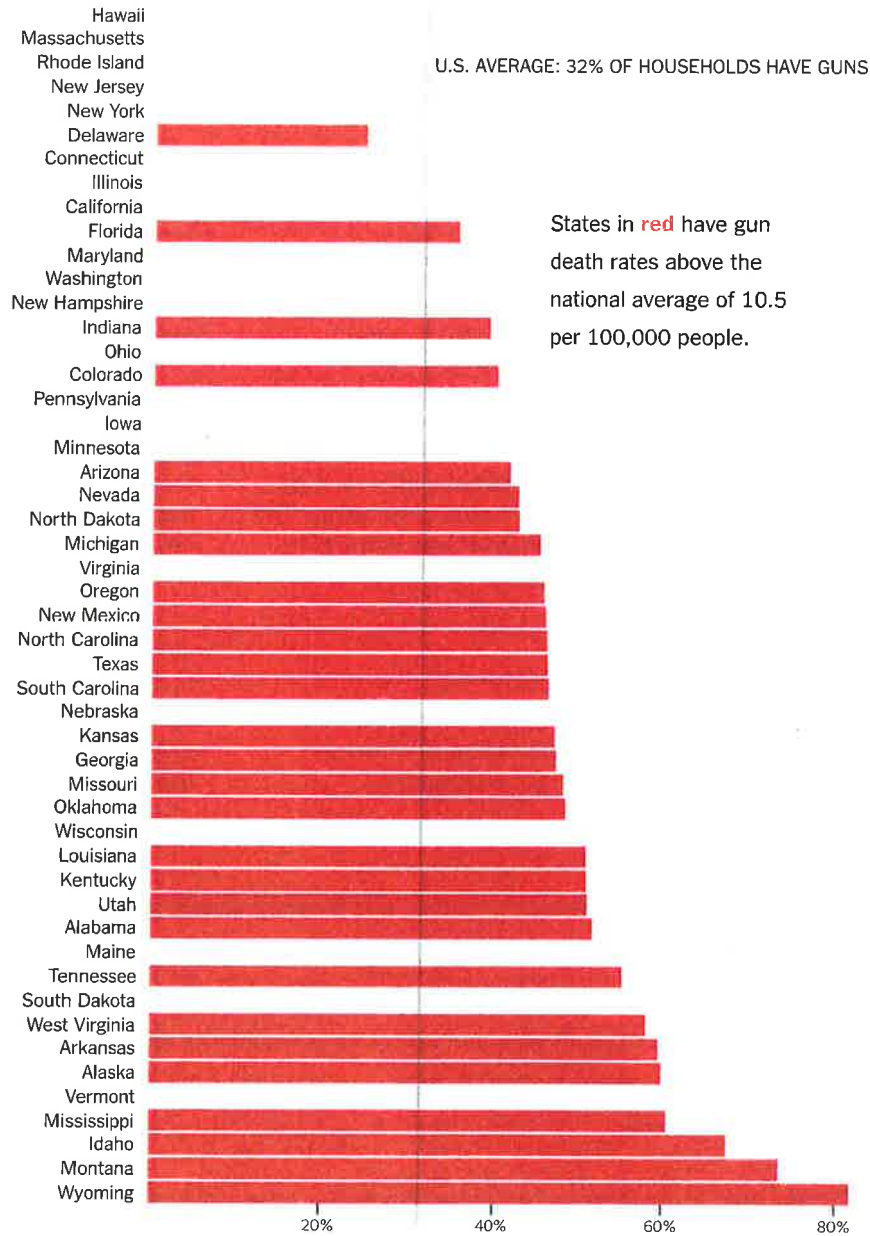
We also need to figure out whether gun buybacks, often conducted by police departments, are cost-effective and help reduce violence. And we can experiment more with anti-gang initiatives, such as Cure Violence, that have a good record in reducing shootings.

Fewer Guns = Fewer Deaths

It is true that guns are occasionally used to stop violence. But contrary to what the National Rifle Association suggests, this is rare. One study by the Violence Policy Center found that in 2012 there were 259 justifiable homicides by a private citizen using a firearm.

homicides by a private citizen using a firearm.

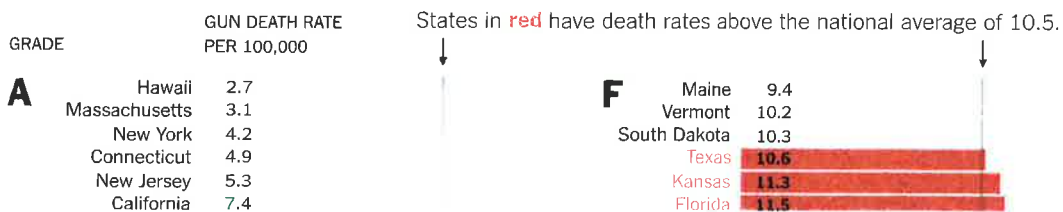## Estimated Percent of Households With Guns, by State

U.S. AVERAGE: 32% OF HOUSEHOLDS HAVE GUNS

States in red have gun death rates above the national average of 10.5 per 100,000 people.
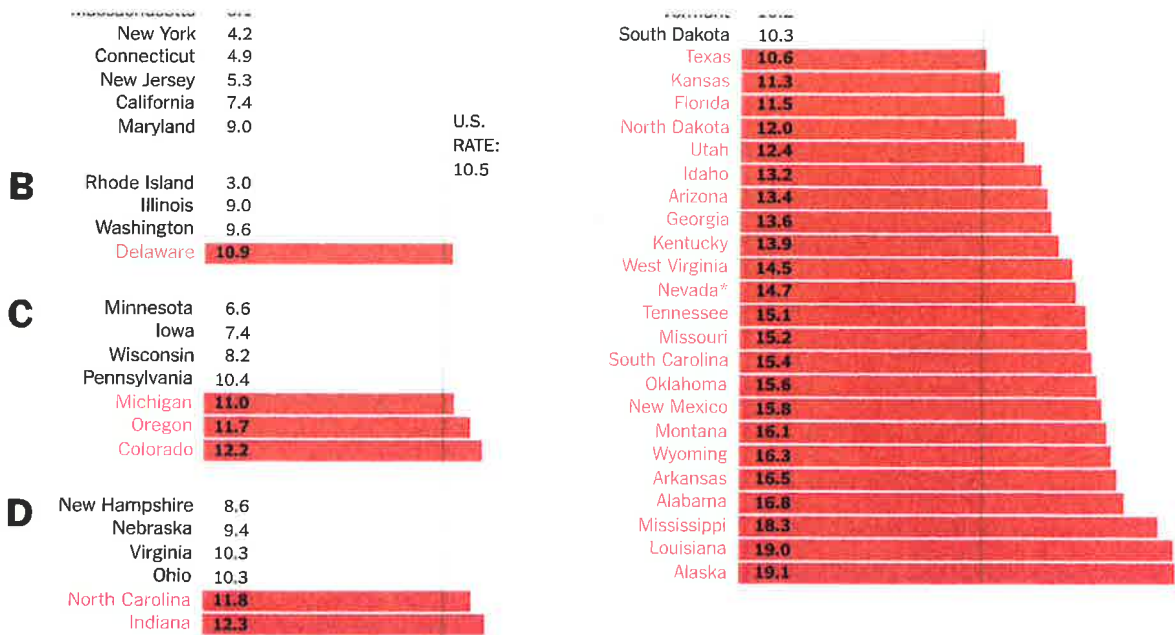
Note: There are no hard data on gun ownership in the United States. This household gun ownership proxy was created by taking a weighted average of the percentage of suicides committed with a firearm — a widely used proxy for firearm ownership — and the hunting license rate in each state. It improves upon earlier models by accounting for the prevalence of hunting rifles, which are typically not used in suicides. The new proxy improves the correlation with survey-measured gun ownership from 0.80 to 0.95, suggesting increased accuracy. Source: Michael Siegel, Boston University School of Public Health

Gun Law 'Grades' and Gun Death Rates

The Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence finds that states where guns are more regulated tend to have lower gun death rates. In its grading system, the strongest gun regulations get an "A;" the weakest, an "F."

States in red have death rates above the national average of 10.5.

GRADE		GUN DEATH RATE PER 100,000			
A	Hawaii	2.7	**F**	Maine	9.4
	Massachusetts	3.1		Vermont	10.2
	New York	4.2		South Dakota	10.3
	Connecticut	4.9		Texas	10.6
	New Jersey	5.3		Kansas	11.3
	California	7.4		Florida	11.5

	New York	4.2	
	Connecticut	4.9	
	New Jersey	5.3	
	California	7.4	
	Maryland	9.0	

U.S. RATE: 10.5

South Dakota	10.3	
Texas	10.6	
Kansas	11.3	
Florida	11.5	
North Dakota	12.0	
Utah	12.4	
Idaho	13.2	
Arizona	13.4	
Georgia	13.6	
Kentucky	13.9	
West Virginia	14.5	
Nevada*	14.7	
Tennessee	15.1	
Missouri	15.2	
South Carolina	15.4	
Oklahoma	15.6	
New Mexico	15.8	
Montana	16.1	
Wyoming	16.3	
Arkansas	16.5	
Alabama	16.8	
Mississippi	18.3	
Louisiana	19.0	
Alaska	19.1	

B

Rhode Island	3.0	
Illinois	9.0	
Washington	9.6	
Delaware	10.9	

C

Minnesota	6.6	
Iowa	7.4	
Wisconsin	8.2	
Pennsylvania	10.4	
Michigan	11.0	
Oregon	11.7	
Colorado	12.2	

D

New Hampshire	8.6	
Nebraska	9.4	
Virginia	10.3	
Ohio	10.3	
North Carolina	11.8	
Indiana	12.3	

*Nevada's grade of F would improve to a C-minus if a recently passed ballot initiative mandating universal background checks is implemented. So far, the state has failed to do so. Source: Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence.

But the problem is that lax laws too often make it easy not only for good guys to get guns, but also for bad guys to get guns. The evidence is overwhelming that overall more guns and more relaxed gun laws lead to more violent deaths and injuries. One study published in the Annals of Internal Medicine found that a gun in the house was associated with an increased risk of a gun death, particularly by suicide but also apparently by homicide.

In 2015, Gov. Greg Abbott of Texas tweeted that he was "embarrassed" that his state was ranked second (behind California) in requests to buy new guns, albeit still with one million requests. "Let's pick up the pace Texans," he wrote. Abbott apparently believes, along with the N.R.A., that more guns make a society more safe, but statistics dispute that. Abbott should look at those charts.

Greg Abbott ✔
@GregAbbott_TX

I'm EMBARRASSED: Texas #2 in nation for new gun purchases, behind CALIFORNIA. Let's pick up the pace Texans.@NRA

10:53 AM - 28 Oct 2015

Mass Shootings Are Not the Main Cause of Loss of Life

Main Cause of Loss of Life

Critics will say that the kind of measures I cite wouldn't prevent many shootings. The Las Vegas carnage, for example, might not have been prevented by any of the suggestions I make.

That's true, and there's no magic wand available. Yet remember that although it is mass shootings that get our attention, they are not the main cause of loss of life. Much more typical is a friend who shoots another, a husband who kills his wife – or, most common of all, a man who kills himself. Skeptics will say that if people want to kill themselves, there's nothing we can do. In fact, it turns out that if you make suicide a bit more difficult, suicide rates drop.

Here are the figures showing that mass shootings are a modest share of the total, and the same is true of self-defense – despite what the N.R.A. might have you believe.

EACH SYMBOL REPRESENTS **500 GUN DEATHS** IN 2016

AN ESTIMATED **22,000** GUN SUICIDES

ABOUT **11,760** HOMICIDES

OTHER CAUSES

VICTIMS KILLING PERPETRATORS IN **SELF-DEFENSE:** 589	DEATHS IN **MASS SHOOTINGS:** 456
SHARE OF ALL GUN DEATHS: 1.6%	1.2%

SHARE OF ALL
GUN DEATHS: 1.6%   1.2%

America Is Moving in the Wrong Direction

Yet while we should be moving toward sensible regulation, in fact we've been moving in the opposite direction. Gun laws have been loosened in many parts of the country. Check out these maps:
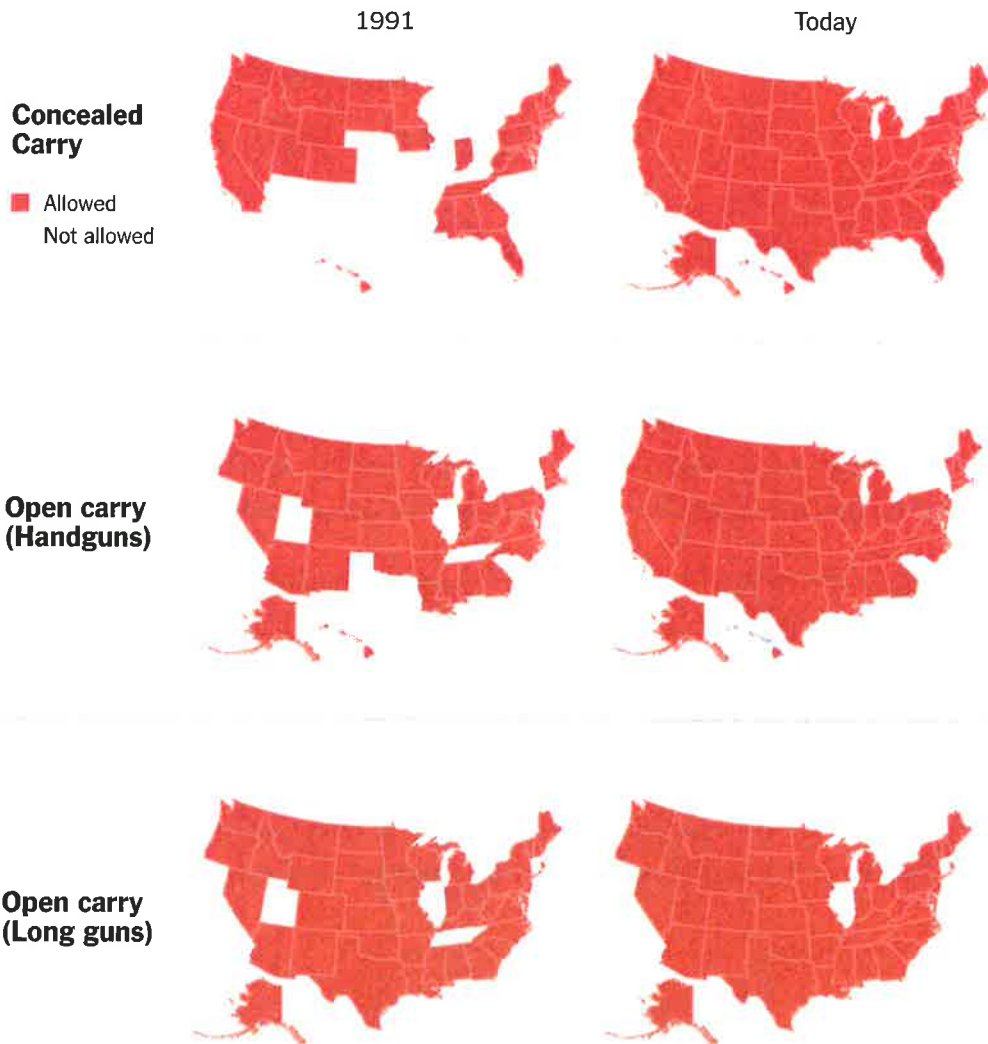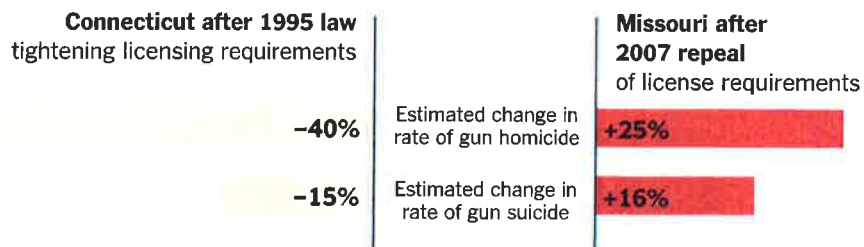
1991   Today

Concealed Carry

■ Allowed
Not allowed

Open carry (Handguns)

Open carry (Long guns)

Tightening Gun Laws Lowered Firearm Homicide Rates

Tightening Gun Laws Lowered Firearm Homicide Rates

For skeptics who think that gun laws don't make a difference, consider what happened in two states, Missouri and Connecticut. In 1995, Connecticut tightened licensing laws, while in 2007 Missouri eased gun laws.

The upshot? After tightening gun laws, firearm homicide rates dropped 40 percent in Connecticut. And after Missouri eased gun laws, gun homicide rates rose 25 percent.

Connecticut after 1995 law tightening licensing requirements		**Missouri after 2007 repeal** of license requirements
−40%	Estimated change in rate of gun homicide	+25%
−15%	Estimated change in rate of gun suicide	+16%

The New York Times | Source: Johns Hopkins School of Public Health

One of the lessons of gun research is that we often focus just on firearms themselves, when it may be more productive to focus on who gets access to them. A car or gun is usually safe in the hands of a 45-year-old woman with no criminal record, but may be dangerous when used by a 19-year-old felon with a history of alcohol offenses or domestic violence protection orders.

Yet our laws have often focused more on weapons themselves (such as the assault weapons ban) rather than on access. In many places, there is more rigorous screening of people who want to adopt dogs than of people who want to purchase firearms.
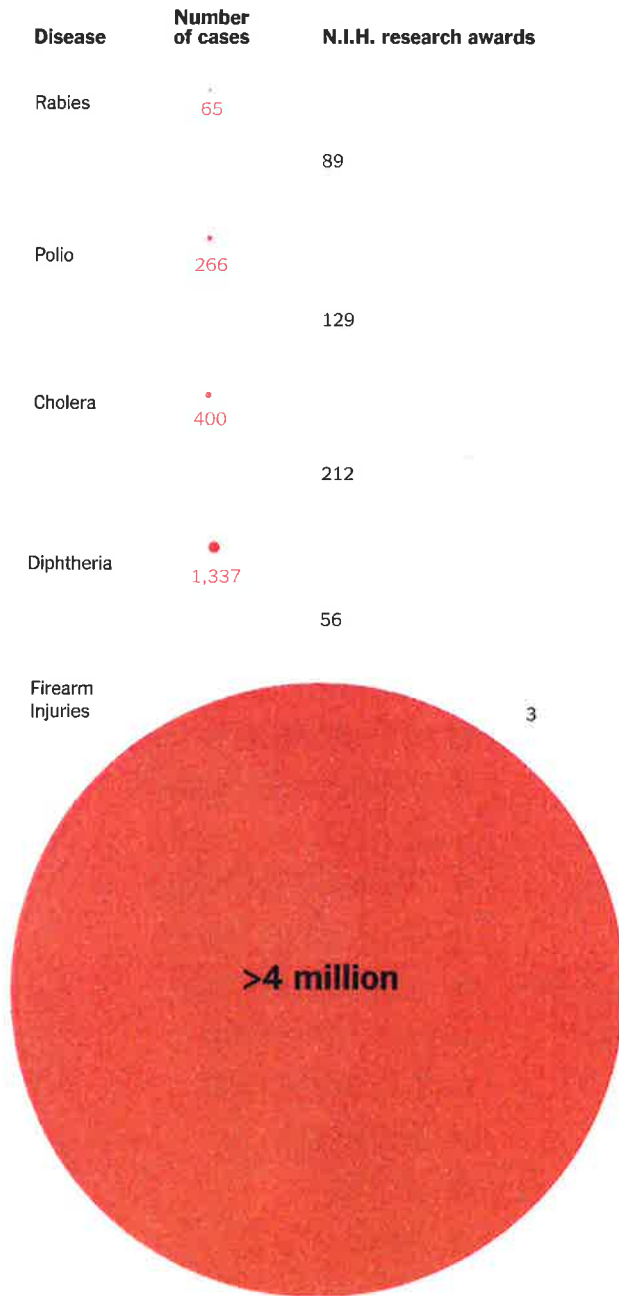
In these two states, the laws affected access, and although there's some indication that other factors were also involved in Connecticut (and correlations don't prove causation), the outcomes are worth pondering.

There Is a Shocking Lack of Research on Guns

There's simply a scandalous lack of research on gun violence, largely because the N.R.A. is extremely hostile to such research and Congress rolls over. When the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention did try to research gun violence, Congress responded by cutting its funding.

Here is the American toll from four diseases and firearms over the years

research gun violence, Congress responded by cutting its funding.

Here is the American toll from four diseases and firearms over the years 1973-2012 – and the number of National Institutes of Health research grants to explore each problem over that same time.
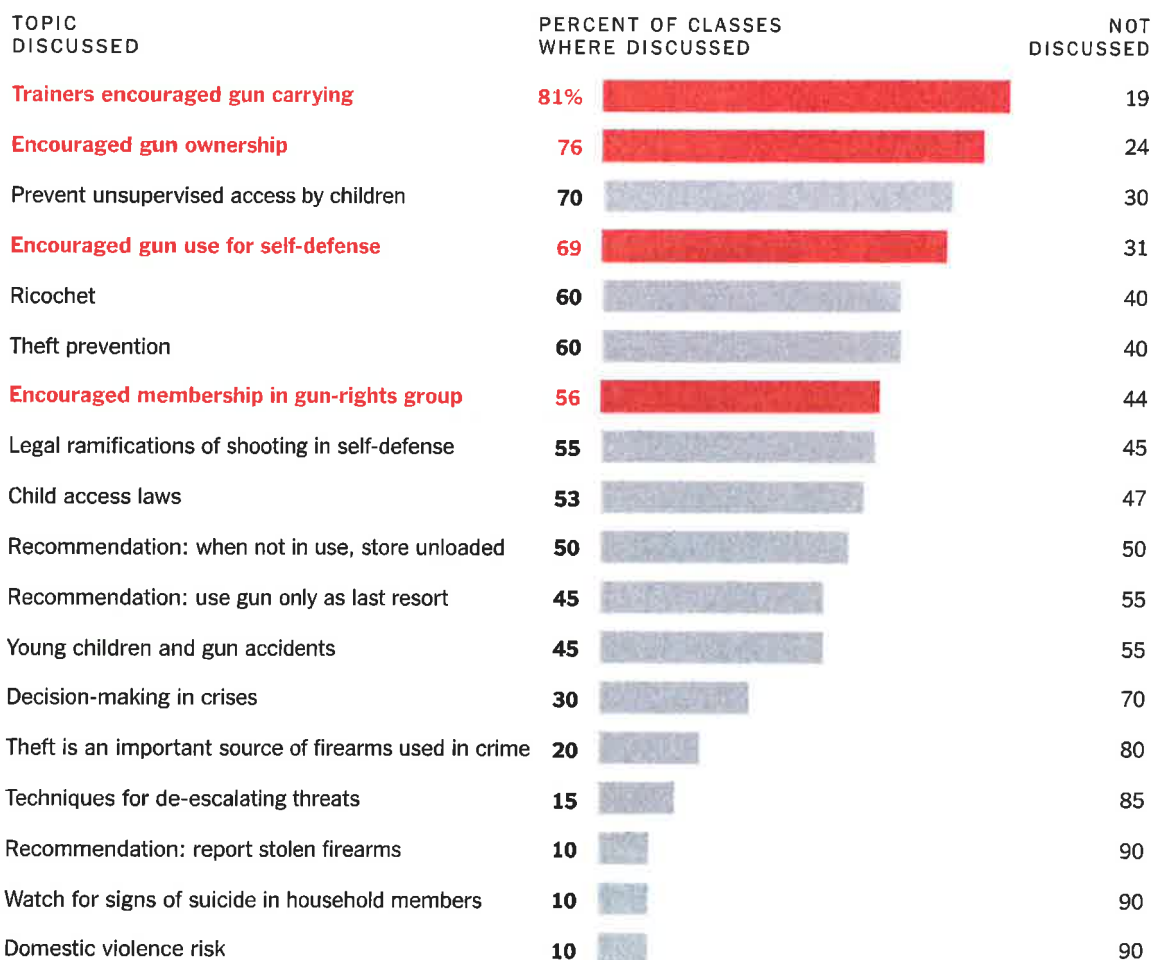
Disease	Number of cases	N.I.H. research awards
Rabies	65	
		89
Polio	266	
		129
Cholera	400	
		212
Diphtheria	1,337	
		56
Firearm Injuries		3
	>4 million	

The New York Times | Source: University of Chicago Crime Lab

The Right Type of Training Could Go a Long Way

One approach that could reduce the abuse of guns is better training. As a 13-year-old farm boy in Oregon, I attended a N.R.A. gun safety class

One approach that could reduce the abuse of guns is better training. As a 13-year-old farm boy in Oregon, I attended a N.R.A. gun safety class (which came with a one-year membership to the N.R.A., making me an N.R.A. alum who despises what that organization has become). These classes can be very useful, and audits found that more than 80 percent cover such matters as checking the gun to see if it's loaded, keeping one's finger off the trigger until ready to fire and being certain of the target.

Yet the audits also suggest that trainers are more likely to advocate for the N.R.A. or for carrying guns than for, say, safe storage. This is a missed opportunity, for all classes should cover the risks of guns and alcohol, the risks of abuse with suicide and domestic violence, the need for safe storage, and so on. Here's what researchers found that the gun classes they audited actually covered:

TOPIC DISCUSSED	PERCENT OF CLASSES WHERE DISCUSSED	NOT DISCUSSED
Trainers encouraged gun carrying	81%	19
Encouraged gun ownership	76	24
Prevent unsupervised access by children	70	30
Encouraged gun use for self-defense	69	31
Ricochet	60	40
Theft prevention	60	40
Encouraged membership in gun-rights group	56	44
Legal ramifications of shooting in self-defense	55	45
Child access laws	53	47
Recommendation: when not in use, store unloaded	50	50
Recommendation: use gun only as last resort	45	55
Young children and gun accidents	45	55
Decision-making in crises	30	70
Theft is an important source of firearms used in crime	20	80
Techniques for de-escalating threats	15	85
Recommendation: report stolen firearms	10	90
Watch for signs of suicide in household members	10	90
Domestic violence risk	10	90

The New York Times | Source: David Hemenway, Injury Prevention |
The classes studied, some of which were required by law, took place in 7 Northeast states.
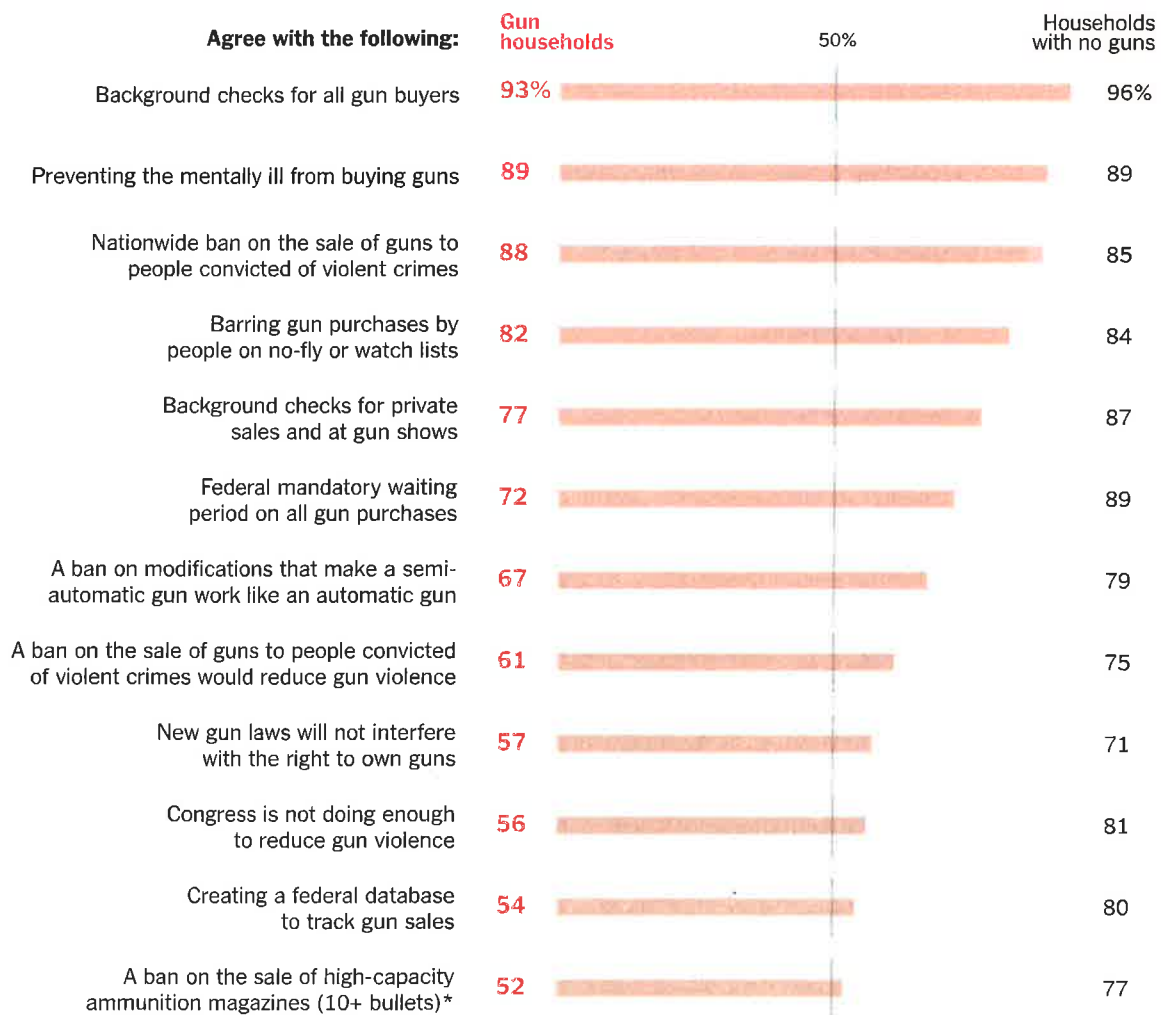
A Way Forward: On Some

A Way Forward: On Some Issues, Majorities Agree

It may sometimes seem hopeless to make progress on gun violence, especially with the N.R.A. seemingly holding Congress hostage. But I'm more optimistic.

Look, we all agree on some kinds of curbs on guns. Nobody believes that people should be able to drive a tank down Main Street, or have an anti-aircraft gun in the backyard. I've been to parts of northern Yemen where one could actually buy a tank or an anti-aircraft gun, as well as fully automatic weapons — and that area's now embroiled in a civil war – but fortunately in America we have agreed to ban those kinds of weaponry.

So the question isn't whether we will restrict firearms, but where to draw the line and precisely which ones to restrict.

Check out these polling numbers as a basis for action on gun safety:

Agree with the following:	Gun households	50%	Households with no guns
Background checks for all gun buyers	93%		96%
Preventing the mentally ill from buying guns	89		89
Nationwide ban on the sale of guns to people convicted of violent crimes	88		85
Barring gun purchases by people on no-fly or watch lists	82		84
Background checks for private sales and at gun shows	77		87
Federal mandatory waiting period on all gun purchases	72		89
A ban on modifications that make a semi-automatic gun work like an automatic gun	67		79
A ban on the sale of guns to people convicted of violent crimes would reduce gun violence	61		75
New gun laws will not interfere with the right to own guns	57		71
Congress is not doing enough to reduce gun violence	56		81
Creating a federal database to track gun sales	54		80
A ban on the sale of high-capacity ammunition magazines (10+ bullets)*	52		77

ammunition magazines (10+ bullets)

Looking ahead, I'm optimistic that there can be progress at the state level, and some of the necessary research funding will come from private foundations. Maybe some police departments will put in orders for smart guns to help create a market.

But the real impetus for change will come because the public favors it. In particular, note that 93 percent of people even in gun households favor universal background checks for gun purchases.

The terrible truth is that Wednesday's school shooting was 100 percent predictable. So is the next one. After each such incident, we mourn the deaths and sympathize with the victims, but we do nothing fundamental to reduce our vulnerability.

Some of you will protest (as President Trump did the last time) that it's too soon to talk about guns, or that it is disrespectful to the dead to use such a tragedy to score political points. Yet more Americans have died from gun violence, including suicides, since 1970 (about 1.4 million) than in all the wars in American history going back to the Revolutionary War (about 1.3 million). And it's not just gang members: In a typical year, more preschoolers are shot dead in America (about 75) than police officers are.

Yes, making America safer will be hard: There are no perfect solutions. The Second Amendment is one constraint, and so is our polarized political system and the power of the gun lobby. There's a lot of talk about banning assault weapons, for example, but the 10-year assault weapons ban didn't accomplish much for reducing gun violence, partly because defining assault weapons proved to be much more complex than anybody had anticipated (in the end, the definition depended partly on cosmetic features). And new restrictions have limited effectiveness because we have delayed so long that there are already so many guns out there. So it's unclear how effective some of my suggestions will be, and in any case this will be a long, uncertain, uphill process.

But automobiles are a reminder that we can chip away at a large problem through a public health approach: Just as auto safety improvements have

But automobiles are a reminder that we can chip away at a large problem through a public health approach: Just as auto safety improvements have left us far better off, it seems plausible to some gun policy experts that a sensible, politically feasible set of public health steps could over time reduce firearm deaths in America by one-third — or more than 10,000 lives saved each year.

So let's not just shed tears for the dead, give somber speeches and lower flags. Let's get started and save lives. Let's not accept that school classrooms can turn any moment into war zones.

I invite you to sign up for my free, twice-weekly email newsletter. Please also join me on Facebook and Google+, watch my YouTube videos and follow me on Twitter (@NickKristof).

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CALL FOR ACTION TO PREVENT GUN VIOLENCE IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Interdisciplinary Group on Preventing School and Community Violence

February 28, 2018

PDF Version

(https://curry.virginia.edu/sites/default/files/projects/Call%20for%20Action%20FINAL%20for%20DISSEMINATION%202-28-18-3-5-18%20Corrections_422pm.pdf)

School shootings and widespread community gun violence are far greater in the United States than other nations. America cannot be great and realize its promise of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness if our children are not safe from gun violence.

Although security measures are important, a focus on simply preparing for shootings is insufficient. We need a change in mindset and policy from reaction to prevention. Prevention entails more than security measures and begins long before a gunman comes to school. We need a comprehensive public health approach to gun violence that is informed by scientific evidence and free from partisan politics.

A public health approach to protecting children as well as adults from gun violence involves three levels of prevention: (1) universal approaches promoting safety and well-being for everyone; (2) practices for reducing risk and promoting protective factors for persons

experiencing difficulties; and (3) interventions for individuals where violence is present or appears imminent.

On the first level we need:

1. A national requirement for all schools to assess school climate and maintain physically and emotionally safe conditions and positive school environments that protect all students and adults from bullying, discrimination, harassment, and assault;

2. A ban on assault-style weapons, high-capacity ammunition clips, and products that modify semi-automatic firearms to enable them to function like automatic firearms.

On the second level we need:

3. Adequate staffing (such as counselors, psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers) of coordinated school- and community-based mental health services for individuals with risk factors for violence, recognizing that violence is not intrinsically a product of mental illness;

4. Reform of school discipline to reduce exclusionary practices and foster positive social, behavioral, emotional, and academic success for students;

5. Universal background checks to screen out violent offenders, persons who have been hospitalized for violence towards self or others, and persons on no-fly, terrorist watch lists.

On the third level we need:

6. A national program to train and maintain school- and community-based threat assessment teams that include mental health and law enforcement partners. Threat assessment programs should include practical channels of communication for persons to report potential threats as well as interventions to resolve conflicts and assist troubled individuals;

7. Removal of legal barriers to sharing safety-related information among educational, mental health, and law enforcement agencies in cases where a person has threatened violence;

8. Laws establishing Gun Violence Protection Orders that allow courts to issue time-limited restraining orders requiring that firearms be recovered by law enforcement when there is evidence that an individual is planning to carry out acts against others or against themselves.

Congress and the executive branch must remove barriers to gun violence research and institute a program of scientific research on gun violence that encompasses all levels of prevention. We contend that well-executed laws can reduce gun violence while protecting all Constitutional rights.

It's time for federal and state authorities to take immediate action to enact these proposals and provide adequate resources for effective implementation. We call on law enforcement, mental health, and educational agencies to begin actions supporting these prevention efforts. We ask all parents and youth to join efforts advocating for these changes, and we urge voters to elect representatives who will take effective action to prevent gun violence in our nation.

Join Us By Signing On Here

Interdisciplinary Group on Preventing School and Community Violence

(names in alphabetical order)

Ron Avi Astor, Ph.D., University of Southern California

George G. Bear, Ph.D., University of Delaware

Catherine P. Bradshaw, Ph.D., University of Virginia

Dewey G. Cornell, Ph.D., University of Virginia

Dorothy L. Espelage, Ph.D., University of Florida

Daniel Flannery, Ph.D., Case Western Reserve University

Michael J. Furlong, Ph.D., University of California, Santa Barbara

Nancy Guerra, Ed.D., University of California, Irvine

Robert Jagers, Ph.D., University of Michigan

Shane R. Jimerson, Ph.D., University of California, Santa Barbara

Matthew J. Mayer, Ph.D., Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick

Maury Nation, Ph.D., Vanderbilt University

Amanda B. Nickerson, Ph.D., University at Buffalo, State University of New York

Pedro Noguera, Ph.D., University of California, Los Angeles

David Osher, Ph.D., Takoma Park, MD

Russell Skiba, Ph.D., Indiana University

George Sugai, Ph.D., University of Connecticut

Daniel W. Webster, Sc.D., Johns Hopkins University

Mark D. Weist, Ph.D., University of South Carolina

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American Art Therapy Association

American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work

American Association of University Women

American Dance Therapy Association

American Federation of Teachers (AFT)

American Psychoanalytic Association

American Psychological Association (APA)

American Psychological Association Teachers of Psychology in Secondary Schools

Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare

Association for Positive Behavior Support

Association of Educational Service Agencies (AESA)

Association of School Psychologists of Pennsylvania

Behavioral Institute for Children and Adolescents

Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice

Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports

Children's Mental Health Network

Clinical Social Work Association

Coalition for Juvenile Justice

Coalition for the Advancement and Application of Psychological Science

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

Committee for Children

Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders (CCBD)

Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE)

Council of Combined and Integrated Doctoral Programs in Psychology (CCIDPIP)

Council of Directors of School Psychology Programs

Council of University Directors of Clinical Psychology

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Fizika Group

Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice

GLSEN

International Bullying Prevention Association

Justice and Serious Mental Illness

Learning Disabilities Association of America

Lives in the Balance

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National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement (NAFSCE)

National Association for Professional Development Schools (NAPDS)

National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors

National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)

National Association of Secondary School Principals

National Association of Social Workers - Colorado Chapter

National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)

National Association of State Head Injury Administrators

National Center for School Mental Health

National Council of Schools and Programs of Professional Psychology (NCSPP)

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National Register of Health Service Psychologists

National School Climate Center (NSCC)

NYC Leadership Academy

Public Advocacy for Kids

Roots & Wings Institute for Family Excellence

Sandy Hook Promise

School Psychology, Division 16 of the American Psychological Association

School Social Work Association of America

School-Based Health Alliance

Society for Community Research and Action

Society for Prevention Research (SPR)

Society of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology

Society of Counseling Psychology, Division 17, American Psychological Association

The Child and Family Evidence Based Practice Consortium

The Mental Health-Education Integration Consortium

The National Behavioral Intervention Team Association (NaBITA)

Trainers of School Psychologists

University Council for Educational Administration

USC Rossier School of Education

USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work

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African American Child Wellness Institute - Minnesota

Alberti Center for the Prevention of Bullying Abuse and School Violence, University at Buffalo

Alfred University

Arizona Association of School Psychologists

Arizona State University

Asociación de Psicología Escolar de Puerto Rico (APEP)

Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors

Association of School Psychologists of Pennsylvania

Atlanta Behavioral Health Advocates, Emory University School of Medicine Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences

Baltimore City Association of School Psychologists

Baltimore County School Psychologists' Association

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Michigan Association of School Psychologists

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Midwest PBIS Network

Midwest Symposium for Leadership in Behavior Disorders (MSLBD)

Minnesota School Psychologists Association

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Missouri Association of School Psychologists

Missouri Prevention Center; University of Missouri

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Montgomery County School Psychologists' Association (MCSPA)

Move Forward New York - Gun Control Task Force

MVP Pediatric and Urgent Care

National Shattering Silence Coalition

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Oregon School Psychologists Association

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Philadelphia Society of Clinical Psychologists (PSCP): The Psychology Network

Pine Forge Farms Therapy Center

Prevention Section of the Society of Counseling Psychology, American Psychological Association

Program on Problem Behavior and Positive Youth Development, Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado Boulder

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Respectful Ways Social Emotional Learning Curriculum

Rhode Island School Psychologists Association

Safe & Humane Schools within the Institute on Family & Neighborhood Life, Clemson University

School Psychologists Association of Anne Arundel County

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Strategies for Youth, Inc.

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Texas Association of School Psychologists

The Connecticut Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

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Violence Prevention Initiative, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

Washington State Association of School Psychologists (WSASP)

Wayne State University-School & Community Psychology program

West Virginia Psychological Association

Wheelock College

Wisconsin School Psychologists Association

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View a complete list of over 2,300 individuals endorsing this document here (pdf)
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Barbara J. Burns, Ph.D. Duke University School of Medicine

Ayse Ciftci, Ph.D. Purdue University

James Clyde DiPerna, Ph.D. The Pennsylvania State University

George J. DuPaul, Ph.D. Lehigh University

Tanya L. Eckert, Ph.D. Syracuse University

Katie Eklund, Ph.D. University of Missouri

Scott Frank, M.D., M.S. Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine

Nicholas A. Gage, Ph.D. University of Florida

Felipe Gonzalez Castro, Ph.D., MSW Arizona State University College of Nursing and Health Innovation

Frank M. Gresham, Ph.D. Louisiana State University

William L. Heward, Ed.D., BCBA-D The Ohio State University

Stephen P. Hinshaw, Ph.D. University of California, Berkeley; University of California, San Francisco

Robert H. Horner, Ph.D. University of Oregon

Edward J. Kame'enui, Ph. D. University of Oregon

Regina M. Koepp, PsyD, ABPP Emory University - Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences

Jim Larson, Ph.D. University of Wisconsin - Whitewater

Tamika P. La Salle, Ph.D. University of Connecticut

John E. Lochman, Ph.D., ABPP The University of Alabama

Celeste Malone, Ph.D., MS Howard University

Jeffrey F. Milem, Ph.D. University of California, Santa Barbara - Graduate School of Education

William Modzeleski Sigma Threat Management Associates

Kamau Oginga Siwatu, Ph.D. Texas Tech University

Elise T. Pas, Ph.D. Johns Hopkins University, Bloomberg School of Public Health

Thomas Power, Ph.D. University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine

Wendy M. Reinke, Ph.D. University of Missouri

Carol Robinson-Zanartu, Ph.D. San Diego State University

Elina Saeki, Ph.D. California State University, Los Angeles

Ronald G. Slaby, Ph.D. Boston Children's Hospital

Jacqueline Sperling, Ph.D. McLean Hospital/Harvard Medical School

Marcelo M. Suarez-Orozcom, Ph.D. University of California, Los Angeles

Susan M. Swearer, Ph.D., LP University of Nebraska - Lincoln

William G. Tierney , Ph.D. University of Southern California

Carol Ann Tomlinson, Ed.D. University of Virginia

Bradley White, Ph.D. Virginia Tech

Roger P. Weissberg, Ph.D. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

Marleen Wong, Ph.D. University of Southern California

James E. Ysseldyke, Ph.D. University of Minnesota

Robert A. Zucker, Ph.D. University of Michigan

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State of Vermont
Department of Mental Health
280 State Drive, NOB 2 North
Waterbury, VT 05671-2010
http://mentalhealth.vermont.gov/

Agency of Human Services

[phone] 802-241-0090
[fax]   802-241-0100
[tty]   800-253-0191

March 14, 2018

Understanding Mental Health's Role in Relation to the School Violence Discussion

Introduction

In the current climate where people are trying desperately to understand the violence of and reasons behind school shootings, a number of statements have been made that suggest mental health treatment is the sole answer. It is important to understand that mental health *and* behavior may be interrelated, but *one is not because of the other*. Addressing mental health alone is absolutely *not* the answer. Instead, we need a variety of approaches to address these concerning situations. Likewise, it is not just about the gun debate, the availability of mental health treatment, the effectiveness of our laws, prevention, etc. We need a multidimensional approach to find ways to strengthen families to help mitigate childhood stressors and exposure to negative events so children, as they grow into adulthood, have skills and people to reach out to in a time of need. In our commitment to address school and youth violence we must recognize the roles of many including families, schools, law enforcement, mental health providers, human service providers, child welfare and others all of which contribute to positive development of social-emotional skills in children.

Mental health and mental illness

It's important to understand there is a difference between mental health and mental illness. We all have mental health, just like we have physical health. And we have mental health to varying degrees. We can exhibit symptoms of poor mental health and not reach the threshold of being diagnosed with a mental health condition or mental illness. We can recover from a mental illness. Through appropriate treatment we can minimize the impact a mental illness has on our lives. We can build resiliency to help support optimal mental health. Just like exercising helps your body, building skills and relationships to deal with adversity builds positive mental health.

Some people experience a mental health condition to the point they are considered mentally ill. Just like other health illnesses, mental illness can have a wide continuum of symptoms and varying degrees of impact on one's life. When a person is diagnosed with something more severe like schizophrenia or bi-polar disorder, a diagnosis that has a higher likelihood of impacting one's ability to function well at different points in his or her life, we describe the person as having a mental illness. Other mental health diagnoses are not necessarily seen as mental illnesses, because their symptoms can be well managed. A well-managed mental condition, like someone who has a physical ailment that is well-treated, can stave off the development of a more serious illness in the future.

What does the data say?

People with mental illness are up to 5 times more likely to be the victim of a crime than to commit one. Only 3% to 5% of all violence is attributable to a person with a serious mental illness. The impression that must be corrected is society's far too often labeling of people who engage in violent behavior as "mentally ill." The vast majority of tragic events have not been perpetrated by individuals with a mental

illness. In fact, they are much more likely to have been the result of individuals with some or many of the other factors described below.

Maladaptive and violent behaviors

There are people who have developed ways of getting their needs met that may have been effective for the situation they were in, yet generalizing those behaviors across settings is not socially acceptable. These individuals may have little or no concerns for others' feelings or needs, make dramatic statements or gestures to gain a specific response from people, or threaten or engage in self-harm to get their desired response. For people who struggle with these maladaptive ways of getting their needs met, there is considerable evidence that shows psychiatric hospitalization and medications have limited, if any, impact on their behavior. There may be options to address the negative behaviors, especially if identified early, but traditional treatment such as therapy, medication, inpatient hospitalization or residential care are mostly ineffective. To the extent such options are employed, they definitely should not be used alone and must be in conjunction with other responses such as developing coping skills, learning anger management, addressing isolation and hopelessness, among others.

Contributing influences

Other factors are more likely to influence negative behavior by the individual, either towards themselves or towards others. Such as:

- Bullying
- Anger control issues
- Isolation and feeling along
- Feeling discounted from society, communities, friends and family
- Lack of skills to deal with adversity or lack of resiliency skills
- Feeling there are no opportunities
- Feeling there is nowhere to turn
- Feeling entitled
- Feeling treated unfairly
- A lack of meaning in one's life

If a person is struggling with a mental health condition; and they are the victim of bullying or harassment, have little or no social supports/are isolated, feel that his or her social/economic status is not going to change, or has come from a family where mental health or addictions are an issue; just treating the person's mental health condition alone will not attain the desired positive change as long as the other factors still exist and are not addressed. One could argue that a person with these factors could become more dangerous if the only thing addressed is the mental health condition, as the person will likely become more energized and the stresses would continue and their frustration/anger with their situation may overflow.

Describing this as a mental health issue furthers the stigma that people with mental health issues are violent. That is not true, but people experiencing the factors described in this document and unhealthy mental health can contribute to acting out behavior including violence. Society does not have a way of discussing abhorrent behavior, and when behavior seems "unthinkable" to the common person, it is described as a mental health issue due to the general lack of understanding that bad, scary, and

.VERMONT

"unthinkable" behaviors happen and are perpetrated by people with maladaptive ways of interacting with society and *not* because they have a mental illness.

What can mental health treatment do?
Mental Health treatment has countless benefits; however, it is not a magic panacea or cure for all of society's ills. For those who struggle with managing conflicts, stress, emotional upheaval, and other issues; mental health treatment can help people develop the skills to better manage these conflicts, stresses and emotions. Mental Health treatment can help those with serious and persistent mental illness (i.e. Schizophrenia, Bipolar Disorder, etc.) live safely and often independently outside of institutions.

Examples of services mental health providers can offer include:
- Assess for mental health conditions
- Develop and make recommendations for treatment options
- Provide treatment to address the identified mental health issues
- Help individuals identify the areas they want to focus on to have a more successful and fulfilling life
- Work on skill development to deal with emotional stressors
- Work with team members to better understand how to respond to mental health and emotional stressors
- Work with team members to provide a comprehensive coordinated plan of care
- Work with families to gain skills necessary to address mental health and emotional stressors for their child and for themselves to reduce parenting stress
- Offer consultation to other settings where individuals spend time such as schools, employment, child care settings, primary care, first responders etc.
- Help individuals connect with other services such as mentors, housing supports, employment services etc.
- Connect with other health care professionals to make sure the whole person's health is considered and treated

Individuals will also need positive opportunities, job skills, educational alternatives, mentors and other supportive adults in their lives, positive family climates, positive school climates, access to healthy activities, resiliency skills, and skills to regulate emotions in order to make positive changes. Individuals need to be ready for change and there are several steps to reaching readiness, from not even thinking about change, to considering it, to actually taking steps to change. This positive change cannot come solely from supports, the individual has to be committed to making changes. And if the individual is a younger child, the involvement of his or her primary caregiver and family is essential.

In conclusion
In our complicated society we often wish we could point to an all-knowing answer to solve issues such as violence in communities. It is *not* that simple. If we think there is one single answer, we are wrong and we will never change what is happening. We need to understand this is a *multidimensional problem* that requires a *multidimensional response*. Collaboration and teaming is key in order to address this societal crisis.

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