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E. Identifying Students “At-Risk” for Violent Behavior: A Checklist of “Early Warning Signs”

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Violence continues to impact our schools and, in a sense, we should consider all of our students “at-risk.” The purpose of this Infosheet is to assist parents and school personnel in identifying children and adolescents who are at *greater risk* for engaging in violent behavior.

The following checklist of “early warning signs” will facilitate identification of students who may be in need of intervention. The greater the number of items that are checked, the greater the potential for violent acting-out behavior. For help, turn to individuals who regularly work with at-risk children and adolescents—professionals in the fields of education, law enforcement, social services, medicine, mental health, etc.

Children and adolescents at-risk may:

- express self-destructive or homicidal ideation
- express feelings of hopelessness
- have a history of self-destructive behavior
- give away possessions
- articulate specific plans to harm self and/or others
- appear withdrawn
- engage in “bullying” other children
- evidence significant changes in mood
- have difficulty with impulse control
- experience sleep and eating disturbances
- evidence significant changes in behavior
- have experienced prior trauma/tragedy
- engage in substance abuse
- have been/are victims of child abuse
- become involved with gangs
- have experienced a significant loss
- have been tormented and/or teased by others
- evidence a preoccupation with fighting
- evidence a preoccupation with television
- have a history of antisocial behavior
- programs/movies with violent themes
- evidence a low tolerance for frustration
- evidence a preoccupation with games with violent themes
- externalize blame for their difficulties
- evidence a preoccupation with guns and other weapons
- have harmed small animals
- have access to a firearm
- have engaged in fire setting
- have brought a weapon to school
- evidence persistent bed wetting
- evidence frequent disciplinary problems
- appear/acknowledge feeling depressed
- exhibit poor academic performance
- talk about not being around
- have been frequently truant from school