



## LESSONS LEARNED

Studies conducted by the FBI Behavioral Analysis Unit have identified key lessons from prior active shooter incidents:

**ACTIVE SHOOTERS DON'T SNAP.** They spend time planning and preparing for their attacks, which offers opportunities for prevention.

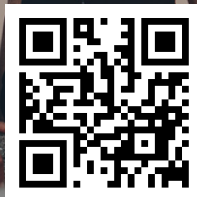
Prior to most active shooter incidents, bystanders observed **multiple behaviors** that caused them to become concerned.

**THE "ANGRY LONER" IS A MYTH.** Active shooters have significant in person and online social interactions.

**COMMON MOTIVES** for attack include revenge, a desire for control, to attempt to right a wrong, and/or a hope for being seen as important or famous.

People are much more likely to become active shooters if a **bystander does nothing** after observing worrisome behavior, suggesting that individuals may see bystander inaction as "permission" to act violently.

For more information, visit our website  
[www.fbi.gov/BAU](http://www.fbi.gov/BAU)



## YOUR ROLE

### BYSTANDERS

Bystanders are people who may learn of concerning activities by someone thinking about committing an act of targeted violence. When bystanders act on this information, they play a key role in preventing attacks.

### UNIQUE INSIGHT

Parents and family, loved ones, and friends are most likely to observe concerning behaviors. They also understand an individual's "normal" behavior and why that behavior may have changed. This can help authorities gain necessary context to understand the individual and their behaviors.

### VIOLENCE PREVENTION

While targeted violence cannot be predicted, some violent acts can be prevented. Bystanders are key for early identification of behavior that may indicate future violence. The earlier potential violence can be recognized the more options are available to avoid future violence, especially when a crime has not yet been committed. Non-criminal solutions are often available to address concerns or to help people and their loved ones.

### ANCHORS

Positive, healthy relationships and interests help stabilize a person, help them learn coping skills, and provide support. These anchors can help prevent someone from committing an act of violence.

# SEE WHAT, TELL WHO?

How to spot signs of targeted violence in your **friends, family, and loved ones** - and get them help.



The FBI BAU's Behavioral Threat Assessment Center (BTAC) is the US Government's multi-agency, multi-disciplinary task force focused on the prevention of terrorism and targeted violence. Studies cited in this guide are available free online at [www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov)

# COMMON THEMES

## SUICIDAL THINKING

Active shooters think of killing themselves more than the average population does. Many of those who commit mass violence consider killing themselves before their attack.

## EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

Many active shooters showed signs that they were depressed, anxious, suspicious, or signs of other emotional problems. These problems often had a negative effect on their lives or relationships.

## UNINTENTIONAL COMMUNICATIONS

Many people unintentionally communicate their plans for violence, including thoughts about harming themselves or others. Research shows most juvenile active shooters made statements (verbal, written, or online) about committing violence prior to their attack. Often people close to them discount the importance of these communications.

## STRESSORS

Most people deal with major stressors in their life without thinking about hurting themselves or others. However, active shooters often have difficulty coping with psychological or physical distress.

The most common types of stressors include:

- Mental health issues
- Financial strain
- Job-related difficulties
- Conflict with peers, at school, or with family

# SEE WHAT

**No single behavior** means a person is on a path to committing targeted violence, but multiple concerning behaviors may indicate cause for concern. Common concerning behaviors are:

Significantly reduced ability to cope with stress or setbacks.

Seeing violence as the only way to solve their problems.

Disclosure of violent plans or upcoming alarming events (verbal, written, or online).

Repeated or detailed fantasies about violence.

Increasingly troublesome or concerning interactions with others.

Angry outbursts or physical aggression.

Behavior that makes other people worried that the person may become violent.

Reduced interest in hobbies and other activities; worsening performance at school.

Obsessive or troubling interest in prior attackers or attacks.

Obsessive or troubling interest in obtaining firearms, other weapons, tactical gear, clothing, and/or military paraphernalia.

Creation of a manifesto, video, suicide note, or other item meant to explain or claim credit for an act of violence.

Asking questions about or testing security at a possible target.

# TELL WHO

If you are concerned, **talk about your concerns with someone you respect**. Share what you know and discuss your options. If you choose to report your concerns, you may contact your:

**LOCAL POLICE OFFICE.** Call your local police department on the phone or walk in to report your concerns in person.

**LOCAL FBI OFFICE.** Report your concerns to the FBI by visiting [www.tips.fbi.gov](http://www.tips.fbi.gov), calling 1-800-CALL-FBI, or visiting your local FBI office.

**CHECK LOCAL RESOURCES** for a school or community threat assessment team or mental health providers.

# WHAT TO EXPECT

Many people hesitate to report family or friends due to concerns about what might happen next.

You may be interviewed by investigators regarding your concerns. You may be able to work with investigators to keep your report anonymous.

When concerning behaviors are reported but no crime has been committed, law enforcement may work with mental health and social services to identify and provide needed resources to the individual and their family.

Threat assessment and threat management is a tool increasingly used by law enforcement to prevent violence. A threat assessment may be conducted by a trained threat assessment team, which may provide recommendations.