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Uproot Abuse. Cultivate Empathy.
Point of View Response to the
Valentine's Day 2018 School Shooting in Parkland, Florida

**In the first 43 days of 2018
there have been 18 school shootings in America and
291 School Shootings in the U.S. since 2013.¹**

THE PREVENTABLE INCIDENT

Armed with an AR-15, Nikolas Cruz, 19, returned to the school that had expelled him the year before for disciplinary reasons. Shortly before the end of the school day, he set off a fire alarm to draw students out of classrooms and opened fire, killing at least 17 children and adults. At least an additional 15 were also injured during the attack. Cruz blended himself into the student crowd to escape; he was taken into custody an hour later. Authorities immediately charged him with 17 counts of premeditated murder. Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School is located in affluent Parkland, Florida and is one of the largest schools in Broward County. The shooting on the sprawling campus happened despite the presence of police officers at the school. Parkland has been rated one of the safest communities in America.²

"People were halfway down the stairwell, it just stopped, the alarm stopped. And we heard gunshots coming from the first floor, the second floor and people were running upstairs. We all got upstairs and into our classroom. As my teacher was closing the door he was actually shot and killed right there."

Student Survivor

THE VICTIMS

**Never Forget the Lives Lost on February 14, 2018 at
Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland Florida**

Aaron Feis, 37; Peter Wang, 15; Nicholas Dworet, 17; Luke Hoyer, 15; Alaina Petty, 14; Jaime Guttenberg, 14; Alexander Schachter, 14; Martin Duque Anguiano, 14; Alyssa Alhadef, 14; Helena Ramsay, 17; Joaquin Oliver, 17; Cara Loughran, 14; Carmen Schentrup, 16; Meadow Pollack, 18; Gina Montalto, 14; Scott Beigel, 35; and Christopher Hixon, 49.

Fourteen children and three adults were killed. At least two victims were students who helped children with special needs and a football coach who died shielding terrified teens from a hail of bullets.

¹ <https://everytownresearch.org/school-shootings>

² <https://www.alarms.org/safest-cities-in-florida-2018/>

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THE PERPETRATOR

What We Know About the Perpetrator, 19 Year-Old Nikolas Cruz

- ✓ Adopted as an infant and was living with the family of a classmate after the sudden death of his adoptive mom to the flu. His adoptive father died in 2005.
- ✓ Those who know Cruz said he had **stalked his ex-girlfriend and threatened to kill her** and that the timing of the attack, carried out on Valentine's Day, wasn't a coincidence.
- ✓ Had ties to extremism and was a member of the Republic of Florida, a white nationalist militia group and participated in paramilitary drills in Tallahassee.
- ✓ Posted about his premeditated plans to shoot up the school on social media.
- ✓ Reported that he was bullied and made fun of.
- ✓ Fixated with guns and knives and talked about them a lot at school and on his various social media pages.
- ✓ Expelled after a fight with this ex-girlfriend's new boyfriend and for carrying ammo in his backpack.
- ✓ Legally purchased an AR-15 in 2017.



THE SURVIVORS, BYSTANDERS & SOLUTIONS

This is a short collection of warning signs from the segmented points of view of bystanders- the people who know Nikolas Cruz and who had interactions with him.

Students/Peers

Three former schoolmates of Cruz reported that he was part of the Republic of Florida group and they claimed he marched with the group frequently.

"I never really got close to him, because I always had a feeling there was something wrong."- Sebastian Toala

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"A lot of people were saying it was going to be him. A lot of kids threw jokes around saying that he was going to be the one to shoot up the school. It turns out that everyone predicted it. That's crazy. He was going class to class just shooting at random kids. Everything he posts (on social media) is about weapons. It's sick." -

Matthew Walker, Student

"I got paired with him for a project, and he started talking to me about his life — how he was held back twice, expelled from two private schools. He likes to do reckless stuff. He had aspirations to join the military. He enjoyed hunting."

-Brandon Minoff, Student

"About a year ago I saw him upset in the morning and I was like, 'yo what's wrong with you?' And he was like 'umm, don't know.' And I was like 'what's up with you?' He's like 'I swear to God I'll shoot up this school.' And then I was like 'watch what you're saying around me,' and then I just left him after that. He came up to me later on the day and apologized for what he said."

- Brent Black, Student

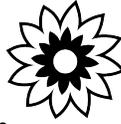
Solution

Peers/students are the strongest voices for preventing future incidents of school violence. If they have a smartphone, they will have access to information on how a peer is feeling 24/7, what they are doing, who they are with, if someone is being bullied or having relationship issues, and if there are subtle or overt threats of violence, homicide or suicide. They will notice something is off sooner than the adults around them. But, their reality is that they face significant barriers to reporting what concerns them because they are:

- certain that they would be labeled a "snitch"
- afraid of getting hurt
- fearful that the perpetrator or the perpetrator's friends will retaliate against them
- trying to determine if their classmate/friend is "crying wolf" or if they are serious
- told by others that it is not their problem
- aware that the perpetrator legally purchased the guns and really can't do anything about it.

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One of the most effective ways to alleviate these barriers to reporting and seeking help is to educate, activate and motivate young people to become better bystanders-together. Peer to peer prevention efforts are about getting to the "Tipping Point" through strength in numbers. When teens do not have to "go it alone" they will be more inclined to "do the right thing" because the risk of becoming alienated from their peer group is reduced when others share the same concerns.

School Administration

Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School expelled Nikolas Cruz for disciplinary reasons, which include carrying ammo to school in his backpack and for **assaulting his ex-girlfriend's new boyfriend**. Superintendent Robert Runcie said: "The school received no warning, no hints, no tips about the suspected shooter."

Solution

The warning signs and red flags exhibited by Cruz indicated with high probability that there would be an act of violence after expulsion. There is evidence of Cruz stalking and threatening to kill his ex-girlfriend and a physically assaulting her new boyfriend. If he was held accountable for these crimes and if other mass shooters were locked up for domestic violence, these mass casualty tragedies could have been averted.

Schools have a responsibility to assure students receive comprehensive violence prevention and healthy relationship education, reinforce best practices, improve emergency response procedures, and coordinate with key stakeholders.

A Coordinated Community Response³ (CCR) approach is comprehensive and inclusive of prevention education, victim advocacy, intervention, response, and treatment strategies. It centers around the voices and influence of youth and requires open and ongoing communication between students, school staff, law enforcement, parents/guardians and other relevant community stakeholders who interact with youth. Dismissing the "problem student" from school and placing responsibility solely on parents and guardians to fix the problem fails time and time again and is not a viable solution.

³ <https://www.theduluthmodel.org/>

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BLOOM365 trains school personnel on the best practices for trauma-informed prevention, intervention and culturally relevant responses, consults with school communities on how to develop a youth-centered CCR and provides comprehensive education and advocacy strategies for students, school personnel, parents/family members and other stakeholders.

CCR conversations affect policy change, inspire dialogue and information sharing, inform multi-disciplinary teams of stakeholders and maximizes victim/potential victim safety by holding young perpetrators accountable through a restorative justice process.

BLOOM365's APPROACH TO COORDINATED COMMUNITY RESPONSE

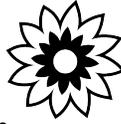


Parents/Guardians/Family

The family attorney indicated that Cruz was “depressed” following his mother’s death and that he did go to therapy. The family indicated that they saw nothing like this coming and never saw any anger or bad feelings about the school. They were aware that Cruz was in possession of a military-style assault weapon. They insisted that it be locked in a safe.

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Solution

As parents/guardians we often straddle the line between respecting our adolescent child's privacy and assuring their safety and well-being. In this culture of normalized violence, where bullying, teen dating violence and sexual assault are rampant, scanning your child's social media accounts, talking to their teachers, school nurse, coach and/or school counselors, checking in with their friends/co-workers/peers to see if they notice anything out of the ordinary, and trusting your gut instinct are all steps you can take to stay aware and dialed in. Knowing what resources exist either in your community or online and not being ashamed to reach out for help is paramount if your child demonstrates the signs of a potential violent perpetrator. If you suspect your child is the target of abuse or violence, BLOOM365 advocates are available to help assess risk, safety plan, and connect to supportive victim advocacy resources. 602.799.7017

Beyond being aware of the red flags of a potential young violent perpetrator, it is essential for the healthy development of children and teens for parents/guardians/family members to teach, show and model empathy, respect, equality, kindness, consent, peace and love as the standard at home and beyond. If Nikolas Cruz felt love and had empathy for his classmates and peers, do you think he would have premeditated the massacre of 17 people?

Law Enforcement

In September 2017, the FBI received information about a comment made on a YouTube channel. The comment said, "I'm going to be a professional school shooter." The FBI conducted database reviews and other checks, but was unable to further identify the person who posted the comment. The Florida sheriff says the high school campus had an armed officer who never encountered Cruz, the suspected shooter during attack.



nikolas cruz

1 hour ago

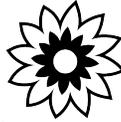
Im going to be a professional school shooter



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Solution

Having an armed officer on campus was not the ideal solution this time and going to the authorities with concerns went no-where. Improving the relationship between students and local law enforcement in order to build trust and to address the problems together is a potential solution. When students feel safe with reporting acts of violence or reaching out for help and law enforcement responds, prevention and intervention can grow.

Neighbors

Brody Speno, a neighbor who spent nearly a decade living a few doors down from Cruz, told ABC News that the suspected shooter was "aggressive, crazy weird, psycho." Speno said he remembers one day when Cruz suddenly "cornered a squirrel and was pegging it with rocks trying to kill it." Another neighbor, Malcolm Roxburgh, said Cruz would attack pets. He called Cruz a "strange character" who always stood out from other teenagers in the neighborhood. Roxburgh's most vivid memory of Cruz is his roaming the streets. Even in South Florida's sweltering heat, Roxburgh said, Cruz occasionally walked around in a camouflage jacket.

Solution

Awareness is the first step towards preventing and reducing violence. Community education on the root causes and dynamics of abuse and violence helps to improve a community's readiness to respond. There is "safety in numbers," so holding rallies and other group activities that show a community supports violence prevention efforts increases the protective factors around youth.



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The AR-15

Nineteen year-old Nikolas Cruz legally purchased the AR-15 he used to kill 17 people within the past year from a federally licensed dealer. An AR-15 Armalite rifle, or as the NRA labels it "most popular rifle," is designed to deliver fatal wounds to multiple individuals within a short time period. It was made for the military and so that members of the armed forces could better respond to multiple enemies. They are designed to kill PEOPLE and not for target shooting fun.

Why are these weapons broadly available to civilians?

In Florida there is a three-day waiting period for handgun purchases. But anyone without a felony record, domestic abuse conviction, or a commitment to a mental institution can walk into a gun store, wait a few minutes to clear a background check, and walk out with an AR-15 style rifle, magazines and ammunition. Under federal law, you also must be 21 to buy a handgun from a firearms dealer. But 18-year-olds can buy semiautomatic rifles.

Production of AR-style guns has soared since the federal ban expired. In 2004, 107,000 were made. In 2015, the number was 1.2 million, according to the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), an industry trade association. Today, one out of every five firearms purchased in this country is an AR-style rifle, according to the NSSF. New AR-15 style guns range widely in price, from about \$500 to more than \$2,000, reasonable enough for a teen to save allowance money to purchase.

Solution

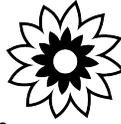
Assault weapons turn violent incidents into massacres. Outlaw all civilian access to semiautomatic rifles and pump-action shotguns. Preventing future school shootings and acts of power and control-based violence, such as bullying, teen dating violence, sexual assault, gender-based violence and stalking among our youth requires everyone.

- ✓ Students.
- ✓ Schools.
- ✓ Parents/Family Members.
- ✓ Neighbors/Community Resources.
- ✓ Law Enforcement.
- ✓ Legislators.

The problem is pervasive and complex, however the solutions to prevent this from happening again are right in front of us. Thoughts and prayers heal hearts, actions bring change.

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THE COMMON THREADS AMONG MASS SHOOTERS

What do these seemingly random perpetrators have in common?

- ✓ Domestic Violence:
 - More than 50% of the mass shooters in the U.S. in recent years have roots in perpetrating or experiencing dating abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault or bullying.⁴
- ✓ Gender:
 - 100% of school shooters are males and 92% of all mass shooters are males⁵
- ✓ Race:
 - 54% of mass shooters are white⁶
- ✓ AR-15's:
 - AR-15's were used in the mass casualty shootings in Parkland, Las Vegas, Sutherland Springs, Sandy Hook, San Bernadino, Orlando and Aurora⁷
- ✓ Psychiatric Drugs:
 - Only 12% of the school shootings and school related acts of violence have been committed by those diagnosed with a mental illness and who were taking or *withdrawing from* psychiatric drugs.⁸

What are the signs that someone is at risk for become a mass shooter?

- ✓ History of domestic violence, possessiveness/dominance behavior
- ✓ History of being bullied/ lone wolf/ ostracized
- ✓ Access to and/or fixation with weapons
- ✓ Feeling powerless (no self-esteem, no social connections, no stability)
- ✓ Lack of empathy
- ✓ Posting thoughts of committing violence or posing with weapons on social media
- ✓ Belief in rigid gender roles such as male dominance

⁴ <https://everytownresearch.org/reports/mass-shootings-analysis/>

⁵ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/476445/mass-shootings-in-the-us-by-shooter-s-gender/>

⁶ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/476456/mass-shootings-in-the-us-by-shooter-s-race/>

⁷ <http://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-ar-15-story.html>

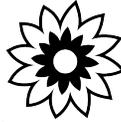
⁸ https://www.cchrint.org/psychiatric-drugs/drug_warnings_on_violence/

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THE RISK & PROTECTIVE FACTORS

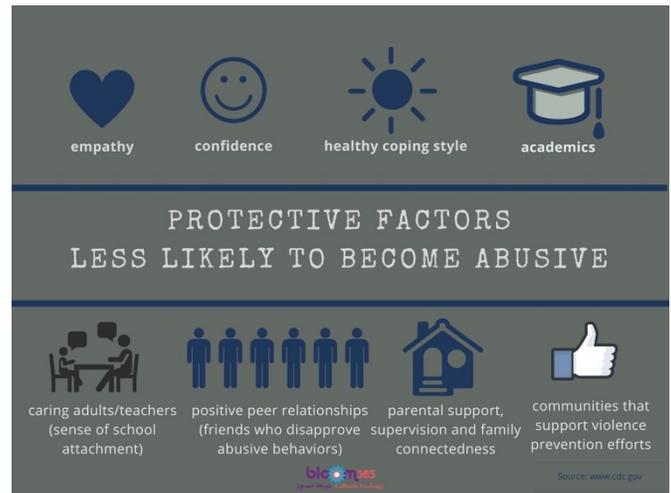
There are several prevalent risk factors that indicate if a child or teen will become abusive or violent. They are listed on the infographic to the right.

In terms of violence prevention, a **risk factor** is any attribute, characteristic or exposure of an individual that increases the likelihood of them perpetrating verbal, emotional or physical violence.



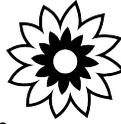
Protective factors are conditions or attributes (skills, strengths, resources, supports or coping strategies) in individuals, families, communities or the larger society that help people deal more effectively with stressful events and mitigate or eliminate risk for becoming abusive or violent.

At BLOOM365, these risk and protective factors, along with an extensive collection of research and our own evidence informed data, guide our prevention and intervention work with teens, schools and communities.



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Well-Being & Why It Matters

At BLOOM365, we measure social and emotional health and safety through five indicators of well-being:

- ✓ **Self-Esteem-** When a teen has a strong sense of self-worth and a positive self-esteem they are less likely to become possessive, jealous and abusive or self-harm and are more likely to develop the skills for building healthy relationships. When a teen is dealing with a depleted self-esteem, feelings of worthlessness and/or abandonment they often have a hard time coping and some turn to using power and control tactics like dating abuse, domestic violence and/or gun violence to cope with feeling powerless. Insecurity is one of the most significant root causes of **power and control** among youth, which often manifests into abuse and violence.

In this case, Nikolas Cruz was abandoned (his parents are deceased), he was embarrassed (his girlfriend broke up with him), he was bullied and labeled "a weird psycho," and he was expelled from school. One could make the case that he had low self-esteem and deep insecurities. He gained his power and control back by choosing to shoot up his school and take the lives of 17 people.

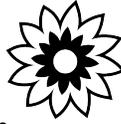
- ✓ **Social Connectedness-** Relationships bring humans comfort, provide love, allow them to confide in people or feel part of a group. Teens thrive when they have healthy social inclusion and connection with their peers.

From all accounts, Nikolas Cruz was socially isolated and was on the social perimeter with his peers. Paul Gold lived next door to Cruz in Parkland and says Cruz complained about being picked on and bullied in school. Feeling lonely and rejected is a dangerous place for any human, especially a teen. After the shooting students described Cruz as a loner who struggled in school. Instead of achieving it at school or with peers, he found social connectedness through joining the Republic of Florida extremist group and via social media.

- ✓ **Stability-** Stability intersects with all aspects of life and often leads to a sense of control and predictability that is vital for kids, teens and adults to thrive. Instability, whether it is situational, residential, economic, stress related, or the disruption in family dynamics or traditions, negatively impacts teens at many levels such as physical and mental well being, how they view the world around them and interactions with their peers and others.

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Nikolas Cruz lost his parents, was uprooted from his home, was expelled from school, no longer had a girlfriend and clearly lacked stability in his life. He had been bouncing around since the death of his adoptive mother in November.

- ✓ **Self-Efficacy-** Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997). It reflects confidence in the ability to exert control over one's own motivation, behavior, and social environment. A teen who feels little or no control over, or ability to change, their life or environment will likely have difficulty accomplishing goals and often resorts to behaviors such as bullying and violence as a way to gain power and control.

Nikolas Cruz is a powerless young man who chose to execute self-efficacy by practicing how to kill with an AR-15 and learning how to use it to inflict power over a situation that he had no control over (how others viewed/treated him, parents' deaths, expulsion from school, relationship break-up, etc.). He chose Valentine's day to shoot up his school and kill students and teachers in an act of violence to gain self-efficacy through power and control.

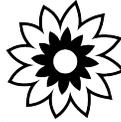
Connections to Resources- Meaningful connections to resources helps to meet the social and emotional needs of teens. Lack of connection to resources and effective interventions can turn lethal, as in this case. Barriers to accessing help and resources differ from community to community.

Next door neighbor Paul Gold says Cruz's adoptive mother brought him to therapy and he had a counselor, but that all ended when she died. He became disconnected from resources and had no meaningful connections with friends and family.

For additional information on measuring well-being, visit: fullframeinitiative.org

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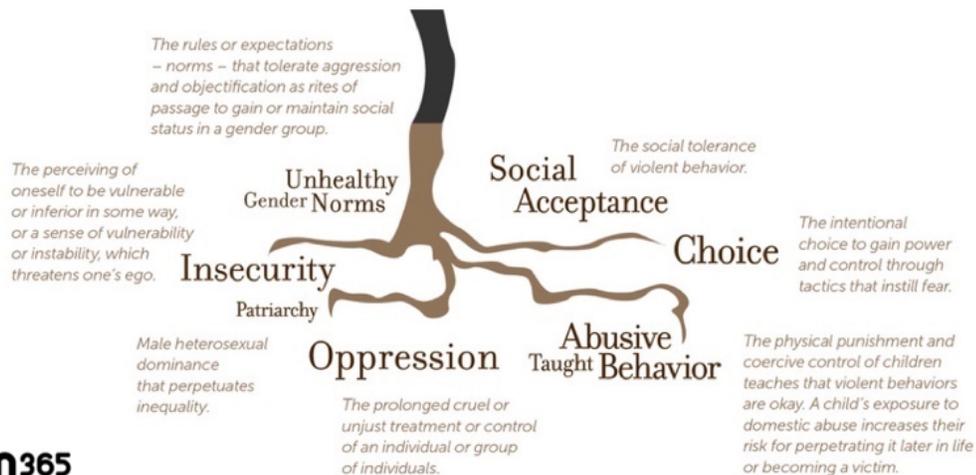
THE ROOT CAUSES OF POWER AND CONTROL THAT LEAD TO VIOLENCE

Why does this happen?

Violence is a social disease of power and control. It is not about anger. If this was a problem stemmed in anger every human who gets angry would be violent. Mass shooters feel powerless and gain power and control through violence.

- ✓ Rigid and unhealthy gender norms
- ✓ Social acceptance of violence in media, communities and families
- ✓ Insecurity
- ✓ Taught abusive behavior
- ✓ Choice
- ✓ Oppression/Patriarchy

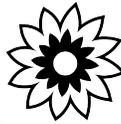
root causes of power & control
that lead to abuse and violence



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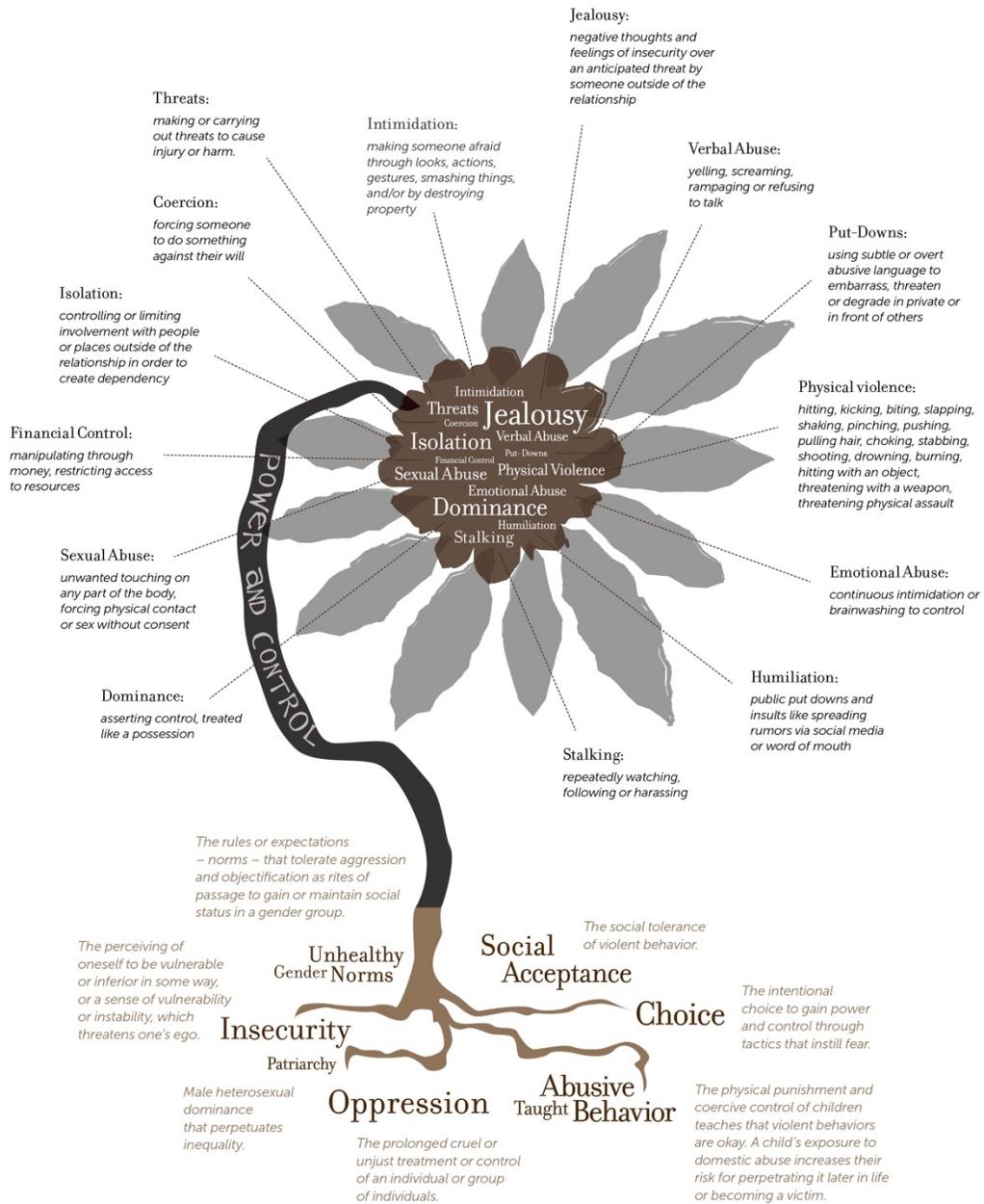
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What do you do if you see someone exhibiting these signs? Here are some intervention tips on what to do if you suspect someone is at risk for perpetrating violence:

FOR TEENS

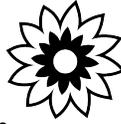
- ✓ If you see someone posting photos with weapons or talking about inflicting pain or violence on someone report it to the police, to your school, your parent/guardian and to an adult you trust immediately. Be sure to report it to more than one adult.
- ✓ Notify the social media platform.
- ✓ If this person is controlling or abusive to their dating partner be sure to report that, too.
- ✓ If you are unsure, it is best to report what you see/hear anyway just to be safe.
- ✓ Find other friends/peers who see/hear what you do and report it together if you feel uncomfortable going alone.
- ✓ The saying "hurt people, hurt people" holds a lot of weight. Look for the opportunities to reach out to someone you feel is isolated. Ask your peers to do the same. Don't feel like you need to be friends with everyone-that's not realistic. But, you can always show kindness to someone you feel may be hurting.
- ✓ Understand that violence is not an inevitable part of growing up.
- ✓ Learn about ways you can help cultivate safe, healthy relationships and schools. Check out bloom365.org to see what the opportunities we provide to teens.

FOR PARENTS

- ✓ Keep an eye out for the risk factors.
- ✓ Be sure to increase your teens' protective factors. For example:
 - Volunteering can help to boost empathy.
 - Learning an instrument, playing a sport, mastering a new skill can help increase self-esteem and confidence.
 - LISTEN instead of lecture.
 - If you notice your teen has a hard time coping, reach out for help. BLOOM365 can connect you to resources.
 - Talk to your teen regularly to assure they are not isolated or feeling detached from their peers. If you need help with this, call us or visit bloom365.org
- ✓ Look at what they are posting on social media.
- ✓ Model healthy relationships so that they see respect, empathy, consent, equality, etc. at home. If you are perpetrating domestic violence know that you are teaching you are reinforcing the social acceptance of violence and teaching your teen that it is okay.
- ✓ Ask your kids' school what they are doing to prevent violence. Share our resources with them or seek out other resources.

"Tomorrow's casualty count and the extent of our children's exposure to and experience with violence all depend on what we do today."
Judge Lynn Toler, Divorce Court & BLOOM365 Board Member

"It has a name. It has a root cause. It has a solution."
Donna Bartos, BLOOM365 Founder & Executive Director



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Uproot Abuse. Cultivate Empathy.

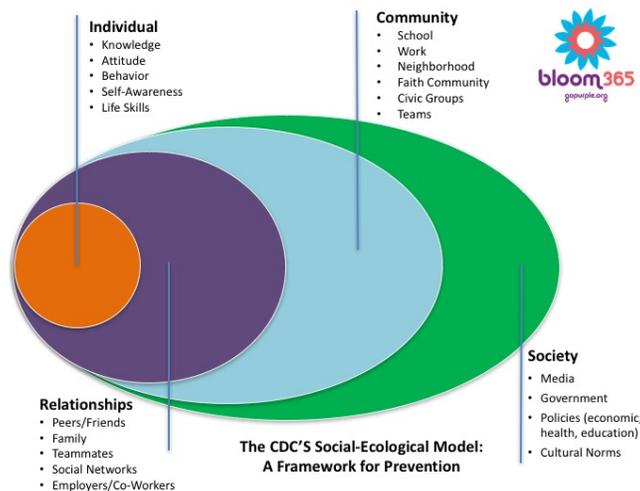
Point of View Response to the Valentine's Day 2018 School Shooting in Parkland, Florida

FOR SCHOOLS

- ✓ LISTEN when students report bullying, dating abuse, or threats of violence. These reports should never be brushed off as “kids will be kids” or “boys will be boys.”
- ✓ ALWAYS ask the target or student who is being victimized how you can help them feel safe at school. BELIEVE THEM and don't blame them for the victimization.
- ✓ RESEARCH local restorative justice approaches or intervention strategies that focus on power and control and not just anger or mental illness for teens who are perpetrators of bullying, dating abuse, threats, etc.
- ✓ IMPLEMENT comprehensive, ongoing violence prevention and healthy relationship education in your school. BLOOM365 can help.
- ✓ KNOW what local age appropriate advocacy, intervention, counseling and treatment resources are available for teens who are experiencing victimization. Vet them well.
- ✓ TRAIN all school personnel in the dynamics of root cause prevention, intervention and response. BLOOM365 can help.
- ✓ CONNECT with a local violence prevention organization to develop a coordinated community response team that includes students, teachers, other school staff, school resource officers, non-offending parents, local treatment providers, etc. to keep the lines of communication and intervention open. BLOOM365 can help.

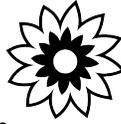
PREVENTION & INTERVENTION

Prevention and intervention are not one size fits all approaches. This involves all levels of the social ecology from individuals, to relationships, to communities and systems.



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Point of View Response to the Valentine's Day 2018 School Shooting in Parkland, Florida

FOR EVERYONE

- ✓ At the individual level LEARN about the signs, symptoms, and root causes of power and control-based violence. UNDERSTAND how implicit bias impacts the way you may respond to abuse and violence. IDENTIFY your boundaries.
- ✓ At the relationship level PRACTICE communicating your feelings and resolving conflicts with friends, family, peers, co-workers, etc. without yelling, fighting, ignoring, etc. SHOW empathy and respect in your words and interactions.
- ✓ At the community level GET INVOLVED and volunteer your time to help local prevention efforts and INVEST in causes like [BLOOM365](#) that demonstrate measurable impact. COLLABORATE with local violence prevention organizations to hold awareness events and serve on committees to demonstrate that your local community does not tolerate abuse and violence.
- ✓ At the systems level VOTE for local, state and federal law makers who understand the risk and protective factors and the importance of root cause prevention.
 - Be wary of legislators who say “thoughts and prayers” with no action and who believe that the pervasiveness of gun violence in America is minimized to just a mental health issue. It is not.⁹

THERE IS HOPE

There's HOPE: Young people are awakening to the social norms that perpetuate the root causes of power and control that lead to abuse and violence. We need to invest more in the capacity and potential of future generations to work in partnerships with adults to shift culture, change laws, and uproot abuse and cultivate empathy as the standard, so we don't have another Parkland.

TAKING ACTION

How do you as a member of the community make these shootings less prevalent?

Seventeen year-old Parkland shooting survivor
David Hogg summed it up bravely and beautifully:

“Please! We are children. You guys are, like, the adults. Take action, work together, get over your politics, and get something done.

This is the 18th one this year. That's unacceptable.”

-David Hogg

⁹ <http://www.apa.org/research/action/speaking-of-psychology/dispelling-myth.aspx>

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Point of View Response to the
Valentine's Day 2018 School Shooting in Parkland, Florida
Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Student



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