

SAFE SCHOOLS WEEK PEER WORKSHOP

The following workshop can be run by students, teachers, and group leaders alike. It aims to encourage thought, meaningful conversation and action around the issue of weapon-related violence.

Some of the questions address short video PSAs (“Josh,” “Michelle” and “You Can’t Rewind Time”). These videos can be downloaded in the Media section of SafeSchoolsWeek.org. Open them QuickTime Player, which can be downloaded for free at www.apple.com/quicktime/download/mac.html.

The blue speech bubbles contain discussion questions for the workshop group. The orange rectangles contain useful information pertaining to the questions, ideas to encourage participation and advice on how to guide the conversation.

Secure a classroom, multi-purpose room or other comfortable space in which to hold your workshop. Set aside at least thirty to forty minutes so that your discussion isn’t rushed.

If you have any questions or would like to provide PAX with feedback on this workshop, please contact SPEAK UP at speakup@paxusa.org or at 212.269.5100.

1. Community

What do you think community is?

Have everyone write down their definitions on a post-it or piece of paper and then stick the answers on the board. Read them aloud. The answers to this will vary. Try to direct the group to come up with a uniform definition.

What different communities are you a part of?

What adjectives would describe the type of community you would want to be a part of?

This is basically an extension of the first question. Try to ask questions that lead participants to realize that an ideal community is a place where one belongs and where one feels comfortable and safe.

What makes you feel safe or unsafe in your community?

Are there weapons in your community?

Does their presence make you feel safe or unsafe?

*Explore this issue. Some participants may answer that weapons in their communities make them feel safer. Ask them **how** they make them feel safer or **how** they make them feel less safe? Encourage them to list and explore the risks of weapons in communities, especially communities of young people.*

2. Weapon Threats and Weapon Violence in Schools

Show the “Josh” PSA and the “Michelle” PSA, both of which are free to download from the Safe School’s Week Website, SafeSchoolsWeek.org.

Have you ever heard of or known about weapons at your school?

Do you think that Josh made the wrong decision?

Most participants probably answer ‘yes.’ If everyone does, ask why it was the wrong decision. If anyone answers ‘no,’ ask to what extent he helped anyone and to what extent he hurt anyone by not speaking up. Encourage everyone to weigh the helpfulness versus the harm.

Why do you think Josh chose not to speak up?

Make a list on the board of pressures and reasons that the group lists.

How do you think Josh feels now?

Although the answer will be pretty obvious, encourage the group to discuss whether the pressures that prevented Josh from SPEAKING UP still seem important to him.

3. Statistics

Give each group member a slip of paper and make sure everyone has a pen or pencil. Ask each participant to write down his or her estimated answers to these questions. Once the participants have had a chance to write down their guesses, you can either read the real statistics or pass them out in a handout.

What percentage of kids in America do you think have carried weapons (e.g. a gun, knife or club) to school at least once in the past month?

*The statistic is 6.5%, over 1,000,000 students. **

What percent of kids in America do you think have missed at least one day of school in the last month because they felt unsafe?

*The statistic is 6.0%, just under 1,000,000 students. **

What percent of kids do you think have been threatened with or injured by a weapon in the last month?

*The statistic is 7.9%, or over 1,300,000 million students. **

Ask students to share the numbers that they wrote down.

Was anyone surprised by any of these statistics? Which one surprised you most? Why?

Was your guess above or below the national statistic? Do you think your community differs from the average school community in the U.S.?

How does knowing the actual statistics make you feel?
Safe? Unsafe? Angry? Sad?

Have there been times when you have questioned coming to school because you felt unsafe?

If students are interested in more statistics, you can offer up these:

Nationally, 3,071,855 (18.5%) high school students reported carrying a weapon in the past 30 days. *

Nationally, 896,650 (5.4%) HS students reported carrying a gun in the past 30 days. *

*Statistics taken from the 2005, Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System: US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

4. What Can You Do?

Take this time to show the “You Can’t Rewind Time” PSA.

Have you ever thought an attack could or would happen in this school?

If you feel safe, what steps can we (students and teachers) take to keep the school safe? If you don’t, what can we do to make our school safer?

Are there things we can do that go beyond the act of reporting a weapon threat to an adult or to 1-866-SPEAK-UP?

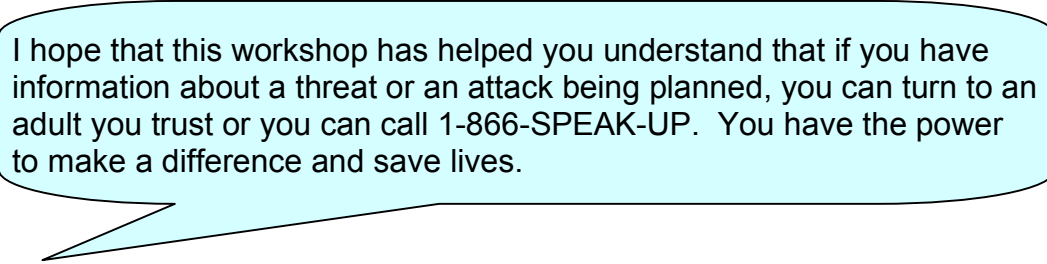
This is a good time to tell everyone that the PSA they just watched was actually written and created entirely by students at Liberty High School in Jersey City, New Jersey—students just like them. If students have trouble thinking of ideas, get the ball rolling by bringing up one of the activities or projects from SafeSchoolsWeek.org. For example, you could ask participants what kind of articles they might write for a violence prevention newsletter.

How can we get more people to speak up? What strategies might be effective? What concerns would need to be addressed to convince your friends and peers to do so?

These questions should give everyone a chance to brainstorm and suggest different ideas and activities. It will also give participants a chance to voice any lingering concerns.

5. Conclusion

Encourage everyone to find ways to actually move forward and bring to life the ideas they had, whether in the classroom or on their own. If you can, offer up a class period, study hall or after school time when students can come in and work on their SPEAK UP violence prevention projects. Close the workshop on a positive note by saying something like:



I hope that this workshop has helped you understand that if you have information about a threat or an attack being planned, you can turn to an adult you trust or you can call 1-866-SPEAK-UP. You have the power to make a difference and save lives.