

**A MANAGEMENT GUIDE FOR  
VIOLENT SITUATIONS THAT  
MAY OCCUR AT HIGH  
SCHOOL ATHLETIC  
CONTESTS**



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# PLANNING FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION

**Planning for the prevention and intervention of violent behavior** which may occur at high school athletic events, and other school activities, **should begin long before the school year starts. These plans should be reviewed on an annual basis.** In addition to any general plans that may be developed, **plans should also be developed for dealing with special concerns** that may arise at selected events. Some events are more volatile than others due to school and community rivalries which may exist, the site of the contest, past concerns that may resurface, and the nature of the sport itself.

The following planning suggestions may be helpful in developing a systematic approach to preventing and intervening with violent situations that may occur at school-sponsored events.

## Long-Range Planning

**Develop a board of education policy** regarding sportsmanship and the behavior of spectators at all school-sponsored activities.

**Develop a positive sportsmanship campaign** throughout your school district and community promoting the practice of good sportsmanship by the student body and adult spectators throughout the year.

**Develop sportsmanship messages** (program inserts, posters, PA announcements) to be used with the student body (K-12), as well as with community members. **Don't forget the elementary and junior high students in your sportsmanship efforts.**

**Schedule preseason meetings** in which at least one parent or guardian attends with their son or daughter who is involved in activities. Use this meeting to **promote the values of activities and good sportsmanship**, and discuss acceptable behavior at school-sponsored activities.

**Schedule class meetings** for the fall, before any activities are scheduled, and **discuss acceptable behavior at school-sponsored activities.** Discuss any special programs you may have that **enable students to exert positive leadership.**

**Involve student leaders from competing schools** (team captains, cheerleaders, student government representatives, etc.) in planning for safety at contests and to build mutual respect between the schools.

**Provide a training session for student leaders from conference schools** to meet and discuss their involvement in managing spectator behavior at events.

**Involve youth group leaders in the community** in the planning and ask them to discuss the issue with students in their youth groups.

**Seek assistance from local law enforcement officials** in the early planning stages for major events.

**Develop guidelines regarding the role of law enforcement and faculty supervisors** during the contest.

**Develop specific guidelines for crowd control** at all events. Be sure to involve law

enforcement officials throughout the planning stages.

**Develop specific response plans for any altercations** involving athletes or spectators from either school. Be sure to involve law enforcement officials in this planning.

**Explore the potential use of temporary bleachers**, portable toilets, barricades, etc.

**Contact faculty members who may be interested in being supervisors** to ensure an adequate number of supervisors.

**Conduct training programs** for faculty members who will be supervisors to ensure they know how to handle crisis situations safely.

**Consider the use of two way radios** in order to keep supervisors and security personnel in touch with each other. If possible, select radios with channels law enforcement can monitor.

**Contact the administration from the visiting school** to discuss supervision of all students and the **promotion of sportsmanship at both schools**.

**Provide all spectators with copies of school rules** through the use of program inserts, posters, and PA announcements.

**Post appropriate school rules at entrances to the event.**

**Consider providing a host or hostess for visiting teams and contest officials.**

**Develop a plan for protecting game officials** from overzealous fans.

**Educate administrators, teachers, and supervisors to look for gang involvement.**

**Ban all gang related activities**, including gang-identified clothing, insignia, hairstyles, colors, and hand gestures.

### **Pre-Contest Planning**

**A pre-contest planning meeting** should be held 1-2 weeks before the contest involving **administrators, coaching staff, cheerleading advisors, student and community leaders, faculty supervisors, security personnel, and law enforcement officials**. **Specific areas of responsibility and concern** should be discussed. Areas of discussion may include **school assemblies** which would address acceptable behavior at the event and the consequences for unacceptable behavior, the **role of cheerleaders** at events, **ways to inform the community of expected behavior** at the event and the consequences for unacceptable behavior, and **the dissemination of information on how any incident that may occur will be handled** by the school administration and law enforcement officials.

*The following specific suggestions may be beneficial in the short-term planning for the prevention and intervention of violence that may occur at school-sponsored events.*

**The visiting school's administration and coaches should be notified** as to the site of the contest, directions and parking for team and pep busses, location of visitor parking, ticket entrances, locker rooms, filming locations, special ceremonies taking place, etc. Visiting school administrators then have the responsibility of making sure the appropriate information gets to the appropriate people.

**Contact the contest officials** with directions to the site of the contest, parking information, a time schedule, etc.

**Designate a host or hostess to meet the contest officials** when they arrive and be available to them throughout the contest.

**Provide incentives to encourage all staff members, from both schools, to attend,** as spectators or faculty supervisors.

**All supervisors should wear distinctive clothing** so they can be easily identified by everyone.

**Cheerleaders, from both schools, should understand what types of cheers are acceptable** and what types are not acceptable. They should also be given **guidelines on what to do, and who to contact, if fans begin their own inappropriate cheers.**

**Contest announcers should be thoroughly prepared.** Proper pronunciation of the names of players and coaches from both teams, sportsmanship messages, messages regarding acceptable behavior, and a seemingly unbiased announcer are all important.

**Timers, scorers, and other workers should remain impartial** during the contest.

**Maps of the school/stadium area should be distributed to all law enforcement personnel and supervisors.** Restricted areas, emergency exits, special seating and parking areas, law enforcement stations, and general flow of traffic instructions should be included with the map.

**All supervisory and security personnel should be informed** about their role during the contest and the behavior expectations of students and other spectators.

**A plan for quietly and quickly removing individuals** who cause a disturbance should be reviewed and understood by all supervisory and security personnel.

**Sportsmanship announcements and behavior expectations should be publicized in all programs.** Signs containing appropriate school rules should be posted at all entrances.

**Contact, and warn, those students who have caused trouble** at previous events and those suspected of causing trouble at the upcoming event.

**Press releases to all media, in both communities,** should inform the public of the efforts being taken by both schools to promote good sportsmanship at the event, and should also address the consequences for unacceptable behavior.

**Publicly recognize schools and communities** for helping to make the event safe.

**Coaches, from both schools, should be reminded of the impact they have** on the emotions of the crowd and of the **need for them to demonstrate exemplary behavior.**

**Coaches should also be reminded that they have ultimate responsibility for the behavior of all players on their team.**

**Student leaders from each school should meet** to foster better understanding and acceptance of each other.

**Consider banning sound devices** such as air horns, bells, and whistles.

**Consider banning laser light pens** and similar objects.

**Remove or paint over all graffiti** before the contest.

**Evaluate the use, or type, of pre-contest music planned on being played.**

**Spectator entrances should be locked until scheduled opening times.**

### **Managing spectators during contests**

**Supervisors**, easily identified by arm bands, vests, jackets, etc. **should be placed at strategic locations** inside and outside of the facility.

**Consider placing an administrator or school liaison officer at the entrance to the facility** in order to keep suspended students, or known trouble makers, away.

**Law enforcement officials should be highly visible and circulate** throughout all areas of the complex.

**Constantly supervise the restrooms** and the area immediately surrounding them.

**Barricading streets and/or portions of parking lots might be useful** in controlling the flow of traffic, both walking and vehicular.

**Every effort should be made to keep the spectators from the opposing teams separated.** This may mean separate entrances, exits, rest room facilities, concession stands, and parking areas.

**Spectators should NOT be allowed to leave and reenter** the facility or loiter in the parking lot, rest room, or at the entry gate or concession stand during the contest.

**The sale of tickets should continue throughout the contest.** Free admission is an open invitation for anyone who wishes to cause trouble.

**Provide incentives for students, K-8, to attend the contest with a parent.**

**All areas inside and outside the facility which are accessible to spectators should be well lighted and patrolled.**

**Gang-related clothing and other known gang identification symbols should be prohibited.** This should be communicated to all spectators well in advance of the contest.

**Post school rules at the entrance to the facility** and have them announced during the contest.

**Sportsmanship announcements** should be made throughout the contest, especially at times when emotions are high.

**Allow only team personnel in the bench area.**

**Provide concessions that will appeal to the group being served and that are appropriate for the setting** (time of year, weather conditions, etc.).

**Adequately supervise the concession areas, especially during peak times.**

**Have designated school personnel check with law enforcement and faculty supervisors** several times during the contest.

**Faculty supervisors, security personnel, and law enforcement should be kept at the event site for approximately 30 minutes after the contest.**

### **If an incident occurs**

**Assess the situation.** If it is safe to intervene, do so. If you question whether it is safe to intervene, wait for assistance. **Training for spectator supervisors is imperative so they know how to properly assess situations.**

**Get the police involved immediately** with any specific incidents that occur in the bleachers or on school property. School administrators may want to handle situations

involving students, but law enforcement assistance may be necessary if alcohol or other drugs are involved, or if other extenuating circumstances exist. Law enforcement officials should be immediately involved when the incident involves non-students.

**Provide two-way radios for faculty supervisors** and have those channels monitored by law enforcement.

**Keep others from becoming involved** in the incident and try to protect others from injury.

**As soon as possible, talk to those involved** in the incident separately and talk to any adults who were in the area at the time.

**If students are involved in the incident, get their parents involved** as soon as possible.

**Enforce the school's code of conduct** and any laws that may have been broken.

**The person filming the contest for the home team should be directed to continue filming** and get as much of the incident on tape as possible. The film may be used for determining the cause of the problem and any possible penalties. The film may also be used to avoid future problems.

**Have the public address announcer make preplanned announcements** to help keep the situation under control.

**Keep police involved** with all investigations.

### **Post-game management**

**Place several police officers or security people at building/stadium exits** and in the parking lot at the time when most people will begin leaving the contest.

**Have security people, or well-identified faculty supervisors, follow people out of the contest site** when the contest is over and have supervisors or security personnel located near known trouble makers.

**Have the public address announcer make announcements about the location of the exits.**

**Open all exits** to allow for the timely exit of spectators.

**Be sure to have adequate traffic control personnel** at the parking lot exits and street entrances.

**Provide adequate lighting** in all parking areas and walkways.

**Provide post-game entertainment** for the home team spectators to slow their exit.

**If community problems have occurred in the past**, police involvement should be increased after the contest. Neighborhood watch programs may also be alerted as to increased activity in the area.

*References: "Dealing With out of Control Parents and Spectators," National Federation's 25th Annual Athletic Director's Meeting, December 17-21, 1994; "Event Management: Long-term, Pre-game Plans Essential to Handle Violence at Athletic Events," by William Ybarra, Interscholastic Administration, Summer, 1994; "High School Athletic Officials Concerned*

*About Gang-related Violence at Events," by John Gillis, National Federation News, May 1993; Mississippi High School Activities Association; New Hope School Security Plan, Columbus, MS, August 1993; Oklahoma Secondary School Activities Association; School/Law Enforcement Relations Handbook, Illinois High School Administrators, September 1994; "Security at High School Contests Subject of Summer Meeting Workshop," NFHS News, October 1998; "Sportsmanship: Prevention Plans Should Be Formed to Manage Behavior of Spectators," by John Olson, Interscholastic Administration, Winter, 1993; Supervision and Management Procedures for High School Athletic Contests, California Interscholastic Association, Dean Crowley, Commissioner of Athletics; Winona High School Security Plan, Winona, MS, August 1993.*

# EXAMPLES OF ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR

## PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

***Make sportsmanship at activity contests priority #1!***

**Adopt a philosophy and develop a school board policy regarding sportsmanship and acceptable spectator behavior.**

**Develop a positive sportsmanship campaign in your school.**

**Print sportsmanship slogans in programs.**

**Promote sportsmanship to parents and other community members.**

**Post lists of acceptable behavior at the entrances to the contest.**

**Make sportsmanship announcements throughout the contest.**

**Encourage radio stations broadcasting your events to make sportsmanship announcements.**

**Meet with the student body to discuss acceptable behavior.**

**Encourage the school and local newspaper to have a sportsmanship column.**

**Develop and present a good sport award for participants and spectators in each sport.**

**Have supervisors at each contest in which your school participates.**

**Have supervisors communicate with spectators during the contest what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior.**

**Find ways to publicly recognize exemplary sportsmanship during a contest.**

## COACHES

***Make sportsmanship priority #1!***

**Be a positive role model for student-athletes participating in, and the spectators watching the contest.**

**Abide by the rules of the contest in letter and in spirit.**

**Teach good sportsmanship to athletes, and reward such behavior.**

**Show respect for contest officials and accept their decisions without arguing, showing other inappropriate emotions, or inciting the fans.**

**Show respect for players and coaches from the opposing team.**

**Avoid unsportsmanlike conduct, such as inappropriate language or gestures.**

**Show support for any participant, from either team, who leaves the contest due to an injury.**

**Display modesty in victory and graciousness in defeat.**

**Do not publicly criticize the opponents or contest officials.**

**Develop a method of publicly recognizing good sports.**

## **PARTICIPANTS**

**Live up to the standards of good sportsmanship** established by your coaches.

**Learn the rules of the game** and discuss them with others so they have a better appreciation for the game.

**Wish the opponents good luck** before the contest.

**Show respect for opponents** by shaking hands after contests.

**Show respect for, and accept the decisions of, the contest officials** without arguing, showing other inappropriate emotions, or inciting the fans.

**Avoid unsportsmanlike conduct**, such as inappropriate language or gestures.

**Cooperate with officials, coaches, and fellow participants** in ensuring a fair contest.

**Show respect for any participant**, from either team, who leaves the contest due to an injury.

**Display modesty in victory and graciousness in defeat.**

**Be a positive role model** for the spectators watching, especially young, impressionable fans.

## **CHEERLEADERS**

**Display an overall positive attitude toward sportsmanship** through your behavior at contests, and in your school and community.

**Select only positive cheers** which support your team.

**Use discretion in selecting appropriate times to cheer.**

**Encourage positive support for your team** when fans begin booing or inappropriate cheering.

**Applaud during the introduction of players and coaches from both teams, and for contest officials.**

**Applaud good performances** by both teams.

**Work with the spectator supervisors to keep order.**

**Show respect for contest officials** and accept their decisions without arguing, showing other inappropriate emotions, or inciting the fans.

**Show respect for players and coaches** from the opposing team.

**Show and encourage support for any participant**, from either team, who leaves the contest due to an injury.

**Show respect for opposing cheerleaders** by wishing them good luck prior to the contest and congratulating them in a sincere manner after a win or loss.

## **BANDS**

**Choose appropriate music and times for performing.**

**Dress in school approved uniforms.**

**Show respect at all times** for opponents, officials, and spectators.

**Show respect at all times for property, facilities, and equipment.**

**Join the cheerleaders** in supporting your team.

**Avoid unsportsmanlike conduct**, such as inappropriate language and gestures.

## **SPECTATORS**

**Show an interest in the contest** by taking part in cheers lead by the cheerleaders.

**Applaud during the introduction of players and coaches from both teams, and for contest officials.**

**Applaud good performances by both teams.**

**Work with the spectator supervisors to keep order.**

**Show respect for** opponents and officials, and avoid taunting the opponent or officials.

**Show support** for any participant, from either team, who leaves the contest due to an injury.

**Refrain from blaming participants, or coaches, for a loss.**

**Stay off the contest area** at all times.

**Show respect for public property** by not causing damage to facilities or equipment.

**Stand quietly during the presentation of the flag and the National Anthem.**

## EXAMPLES OF UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR

**Taunting, trash talk and other intimidating behaviors.**

**Disrespectful or derogatory yells, chants, songs, or gestures.**

**Throwing objects onto the contest area or in the stands.**

**Behavior which interferes with the rights of others to enjoy the contest.**

**Possessing, consuming, or being under the influence of chemicals.**

**Actions or language meant to distract, anger, ridicule, embarrass, or demean others.**

**Entering the playing surface at any time.**

**Booing, heckling, or continually challenging the decisions of the contest officials.**

**Blaming the loss of the game on the officials, coaches or participants.**

**Use of profanity.**

Many more examples of acceptable behavior appear in "Catch the Spirit: Sportsmanship/Citizenship" produced by the Iowa High School Athletic Association,

## IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL VIOLENCE IN MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

The Community Mental Health Centers Association of Iowa, Inc. has developed a list of ten risk factors which may serve as warning signs to help predict possible violent behavior in youth. If school personnel see, or suspect, one or more of the following warning signs in a student, helping put the parents in touch with a local mental health center may be beneficial to everyone by lowering the risk of future violence.

**1) A history of past victimization** - research involving schoolyard bullies indicates that about 80% of bullies were first victims of bullies in the form of parents, siblings, peers, or others.

**2) Children and adolescents who feel isolated, neglected, ignored, and ridiculed** - these children may be more reactive to others, and therefore, more at risk for acting out violently. In addition, kids who feel very isolated in their emotional pain may use aggressive behavior in an attempt to let people know how distressed they are.

**3) Children who exhibit a strong degree of narcissism (self love)** desperately want to maintain a high opinion of themselves. Studies have shown that these children displayed more aggression when their self-concept was challenged by others insulting them. These children may want to punish or defeat someone who has threatened their highly favorable view of themselves.

**4) A strong need for attention** - children who crave attention may be willing to engage in violent acts in order to gain that attention.

**5) Social skills' deficits** - these children do not know how to handle themselves in social situations and may feel very powerless in those situations. Engaging in violence may give them that sense of power. In addition, these children may not have the ability to generate alternative interventions to conflict other than fighting.

**6) School failure** - this has been found to be a significant predictor of later violence.

**7) A background of misconduct and trouble at home, at school, and with the law** - *one of the best predictors of future behavior is past behavior.*

**8) Anger management problems** - those children who respond very impulsively when angry, are more likely to engage in violence.

**9) Dysfunctional thoughts** - children who believe that violence is acceptable, victims don't suffer, victims deserve what they get, and/or have a hostile bias (i.e., quick and often false assumptions that others intend harm) are more likely to use violence.

**10) Substance Use/Abuse** - children and adolescents who use and/or abuse substances are also more likely to become violent due to the alcohol and/or drugs' effects on judgement and inhibition.

*Source: Des Moines Child and Adolescent Guidance Center*