

On Campus Inc.). Researchers at the [University of Virginia Youth Violence Project](#) report

threatening or disruptive behavior. And mental health professionals can initiate a mandatory evaluation process or even invoke procedures to dismiss students who pose a "direct threat" to self or others.

Students must be treated fairly and responsibly—just as administrators and faculty members would expect if they were the subject of comparable inquiry— but the campus is not powerless or reluctant to act decisively when threats arise. Our overall process in this regard is managed by the campus Incident Response Team. You may reach the team by contacting [name and telephone number on your campus]. In emergencies call the campus police first [your campus emergency number].

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Multiple studies have found that college students commit suicide at rates "significantly lower" than 18- to 24-year-olds in the general population (see the [2011 study](#) cited in answer number one, above). One of the most cited surveys found an "overall student suicide rate of 7.5 per 100,000, compared to the national average of 15 per 100,000 in a sample matched for age, race and gender" (Silverman, et al. , 1997, "The Big Ten Student Suicide Study: a 10-year study of suicides on Midwestern university campuses," *Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior* 27[3]: 285-303). Additional support for the "Big Ten" study can be found in one of the most comprehensive studies of college student suicide now available—published in the journal *DfcZYgg]cbU`DgmWxc`c[m`FYgYUfWx`UbX`DFUWjWY* ("[New Data on the Nature of Suicidal Crises in College Students: Shifting the Paradigm.](#)" David J. Drum, *YH`U`z* 2009, Vol. 40, No. 3, 213–222) (based on "[d]ata . . . collected from over 26,000 undergraduate and graduate students at 70 colleges and universities").

*"5fY`a cfY`ghi XYbhg`Wca]b[`hc`Wc`Y[Y`k]h\`a YbhU`X]gcfXYfg3

Probably yes. Caution is required because increases in counseling center visits and use of psychotropic medications may mean contemporary students are more willing to seek help for mental illness. In any event, trying to screen out such students (not a practical or legal alternative in any event), conflicts with our educational objectives. For example, psychiatry professor (and 2001 MacArthur Fellow) Kay Redfield Jamison at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine has written that there is a "literary, biographical, and scientific argument for a compelling association, not to say actual overlap, between two temperaments—the artistic and the manic-depressive." *fHci WjYX`Vm:]fY. `A Ub]W8YdfYgg]j Y`=`bYgg`UbX`5fh]gh]WHYa dYfUa YbhU* hA

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services document "[Violence and Mental Illness: The Facts](#)" contains the observation that "[c]ompared with the risk associated with the combination of male gender, young age, and lower socioeconomic status, the risk of violence presented by mental disorder is modest." Such a "modest" correlation won't be sufficient to draw conclusions about the future behavior of any particular student. Again, individualized assessment will be imperative, focusing on a specific diagnosis, demonstrable behavior, compliance in taking prescribed medications, pnsi

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difficulty is that . . . [t]he offenders are not that unusual; they look like their classmates at school. This has been an important finding of all those who have sought to investigate these shootings. Most important are the findings of the United States Secret Service, which concluded:

“The offender ages ranged from 11–21. . . .” (emphasis supplied)

- * Attacker ages ranged from 11–21.
- * They came from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds . . .
- * They came from a range of family situations, from intact families with numerous ties to the community to foster homes with histories of neglect.
- * The academic performance ranged from excellent to failing.
- * They had a range of friendship patterns from socially isolated to popular.
- * Their behavioral histories varied, from having no observed behavioral problems to multiple behaviors warranting reprimand and/or discipline.
- * Few attackers showed any marked change in academic performance, friendship status, interest in school, or disciplinary problems prior to their attack . . .

A more promising approach is "threat assessment," based on analysis of observable behavior compiled from multiple sources and reviewed by a trained threat assessment team. The report "[Threat Assessment](#)"

Proper threat assessment is a team effort requiring expertise from experienced professionals, including law enforcement officers. Threat assessment on our campus is done by [name of the team or committee on your campus], headed by [identify name and telephone number]. Faculty members should contact the threat assessment team whenever believe a student may pose a risk of violence to self or others. If in doubt seek a threat assessment. In an emergency contact the campus police immediately [your campus emergency telephone number].

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Exercise judgment on a case by case basis, preferably after consultation with colleagues, perhaps including the threat assessment team.

An effort at conversation is generally advisable. Students are often oblivious to the impressions they make. Careful listening and courteous dialogue —perhaps with participation by a department chair or student conduct administrator— will often resolve the problem. At a minimum, the discussion may prove valuable in any subsequent threat assessment process.

Please do not give assurances of confidentiality. A student who appears to pose a threat to self or others needs to be referred for help and supervision. College teachers should not abrogate their traditional role as guides and mentors, but they must not assume the responsibilities of therapists or police officers.

One danger in the aftermath of the Virginia Tech shootings would be a climate of fear and distance between teachers and students, especially students who seem odd, eccentric, or detached. Research on violence prevention suggests schools and colleges need a *cfY* cross-generational contact, not less. The NRC report ([p. 160](#)) stated that:

In the course of our interviews with adolescents, we are reminded once again of how "adolescent society," as James S. Coleman famously dubbed it 40 years ago, continues to be insulated from the adults who surround it . . . The insularity of adolescent society serves to magnify slights and reinforce social hierarchies; correspondingly, it is only through exchange with trusted adults that teens can reach the longer-term view that can come with maturity. . . [W]e could not put it better than the words of a beloved long-time teacher [at one of the schools studied]: "The only real way of preventing [school violence] is to get into their heads and their hearts . . ."

Getting into the "heads and hearts" of students goes beyond individual conversations. It entails fostering a *V&a a i b]micZYb[U[Ya Ybt*, defined not by codes of silence or barriers of indifference, but by an active sense of mutual responsibility. This critical endeavor depends upon the faculty. Now more than ever they must demonstrate skills in reaching outward, not retreating inward.

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