



## School Shootings Spark Everyday Worries: Children and Parents Call for Safe Schools and Neighborhoods

### School Shootings Are Among Top Worries of Children and Parents

As another school year begins, fear of a school shooting is front and center in the minds of America's children, outranking common childhood worries like experiencing peer pressure and not fitting in with classmates. According to the Children's Defense Fund's Parent and Child Trends survey conducted earlier this year by YouGov, fear of a school shooting is the second most common worry for children between the ages of 6 and 17, and the third most common for parents. Among children, only worries about being bullied (42 percent) are more common.

#### Top 10 Worries for Children and Parents

##### Children worry about...

... being bullied	42%
... a shooting happening at my school	33%
... feeling pressure to do things I don't want to do	29%
... feeling different and not fitting in with people my age	28%
... my parent(s)/guardian not having a job or losing their job	28%
... being treated unfairly because of who I am	25%
... not having enough money for food or housing	23%
... getting into college but not being able to afford to go	20%
... a terrorist attack happening near where I live	19%
... a shooting happening in my neighborhood	19%

##### Parents worry about...

... my child being bullied	51%
... my child feeling pressure to do things he/she doesn't want to do	46%
... a shooting happening at my child's school	36%
... my child getting into college but not being able to afford to go	36%
... my child feeling different and not fitting in with people his/her age	35%
... my child being treated unfairly because of who he/she is	35%
... my child getting involved with drugs	31%
... my child getting sick and my family not being able to afford medical care	28%
... not having enough money for food or housing for my family	27%
... my child not getting a good education at the school he/she currently attends	26%

Fear of a school shooting is consistent across racial, ethnic and income groups, suggesting a recent wave of school shootings has cemented mass violence as an everyday concern among a broad cross-section of America's children. Overall, only 59 percent of children—and only 42 percent of Black children—say they feel safe at school.

Concerns among children and parents about safety and gun violence extend beyond schools and classrooms. Although more children say they feel safe in their neighborhood than in school, more than a third of children do not report feeling safe in their neighborhood. Black and Hispanic children are much less likely to say they feel safe in their neighborhoods (54 and 52 percent, respectively) than White children (71 percent). When children don't feel safe in their neighborhoods, crime and feelings of being disconnected and unsupported are often to blame.

### **Children feel adults need to know about these worries and take more steps to address them:**

When asked “What is the most important thing you think adults should know about children like you today?” children emphasized their fears of school shootings and violence:

- “That we are scared to get shot at school,” said a 12-year-old boy from Texas.
- “The school shootings are scary and we feel like nothing can stop it from happening,” said an 11-year-old girl from Indiana.
- “We are afraid because there are too many threats at schools. I want my school to be safe and to have art because kids like art,” said an 8-year-old girl from Wisconsin.
- “We deserve to have a childhood,” said a 13-year-old boy from Pennsylvania.

For Black, Hispanic and poor children and parents, neighborhood violence is a particular source of anxiety and fear. About 1 in 4 Black and Hispanic children worry about a shooting happening in their neighborhood, compared with 16 percent of White children. This is also true for Black and Hispanic parents; 25 percent of Hispanic; 25 percent of Hispanic and 30 percent of Black parents worry about neighborhood shootings compared with only 19 percent of White parents. Children and parents in lower income households are also more likely to worry about neighborhood shootings than those in higher income households.

Overall, among the 20 percent of children and parents who worry about a shooting in their neighborhood, 70 percent of children and 60 percent of parents say they are concerned about a mass shooting intended to harm as many people as possible. Fifty-seven percent of parents and children are concerned about a shooting where one person is targeting another and 47 percent are concerned about a gang-related shooting. Concern about gang-related shootings is far more prevalent among Black and Hispanic children compared with White children (51, 62 and 39 percent, respectively) and among Black parents compared with both White and Hispanic parents (58, 46 and 42 percent respectively).

### **Four in Ten Children Don't Feel Safe in School**



### **Parents share their fears and hopes about their children's safety in school:**

- “I worry each day that my child's middle school might have a school violence problem. I make a point to speak to her about safety and school violence. I also make sure that I tell her how much I love her the second we get to school. I want to say I love you, just in case something goes wrong until I pick her up in the afternoon,” said the parent of an 11-year-old.
- “I don't know about other people, but I worry in excess about a school shooting at my daughter's school. It's happening way too often and something needs to be done to protect our kids,” said the parent of a 6-year-old.
- “It's scary every day sending our children to school,” said the parent of a 10-year-old.
- “We want to know our kids are safe while getting their education,” said the parent of a 16-year-old.

The fear of school and neighborhood shootings expressed by these children and their parents should be an urgent call for all of us—parents, grandparents, neighbors, teachers, advocates and elected officials—to stand up, speak out and protect children, not guns. Children should feel safe where they live and learn.

### **Children share their concerns about school safety and some proposed solutions:**

- “No one is doing anything to make me feel safe at school,” said a 14-year-old girl from Washington, D.C.
- “I am homeschooled. I go to school mostly in my apartment but sometimes at co-op or the library or the beach. My mom goes to school twice a week to get her master’s degree but I never thought about her being safe until now. She says she is safe though. I just want my friends who go to school to be safe,” said a 10-year-old girl from Ohio.
- “I think people would be scared and worried seeing police,” said a 6-year-old boy from California.
- “I don’t like to see guns anywhere. I’m afraid of them. I’d be afraid of a teacher who had one,” said a 10-year-old girl from New York.

### **Children and Parents Want Safer Schools, but Don’t Want Teachers Armed**

Children and parents are broadly concerned about school shootings and their views on how to respond to them and improve school safety are aligned. They support police officers, including School Resource Officers (SROs) in schools and active shooter training, but are not in favor of arming teachers.

Seventy-three percent of children and 79 percent of parents believe police or SROs would keep children safer in schools and large majorities of children and parents who support this also believe those officers should be armed. A 17-year-old girl from Michigan supports SROs “because if anything were to happen while at school, there would already be someone armed and trained inside who knows what to do in any particular situation and would be able to at least help in deescalating the situation.”

Many remain wary of armed officers in school, however. Nearly half of all children (48 percent) and a third of parents (35 percent) surveyed are either not sure about the merits of putting armed officers in schools or outright oppose it. One parent expressed opposition to the presence of armed officers in schools: “The more guns that are on the premises, the more likely someone is to be shot.” A 15-year-old girl from California said she felt that “a lot of these people would abuse their power.” Another child, a 9-year-old boy from Illinois said, “I feel safest without police being at school.”

In contrast to arming officers in schools, wariness and opposition to arming teachers is over two times greater among children and over three times greater among parents. Only one third of children and a slightly lower percentage of parents agree with the statement “teachers having guns in school would help children be safer.” Black children and parents were especially skeptical of the proposal to arm teachers, with only 25 percent of Black children and 19 percent of Black parents in agreement. A 16-year-old Black girl from Virginia noted “There were too many teachers with bias towards students of color like myself and with subtle racist attitudes, so I wouldn’t trust them with any weapon.”

There is, however, almost universal support among both children and parents for in-school crisis response training. Nearly 90 percent of children and parents believe students and staff should be trained on what to do if there is a shooter in their school and 7 in 10 children say they are taught what to do in these situations. The likelihood of a child saying they learn what to do if there is a shooter in their school varies with household income. Only 59 percent of children in households with incomes below \$25,000 say they learn how to respond to a school shooter, compared with 77 percent of children in households with incomes of \$100,000 or more.

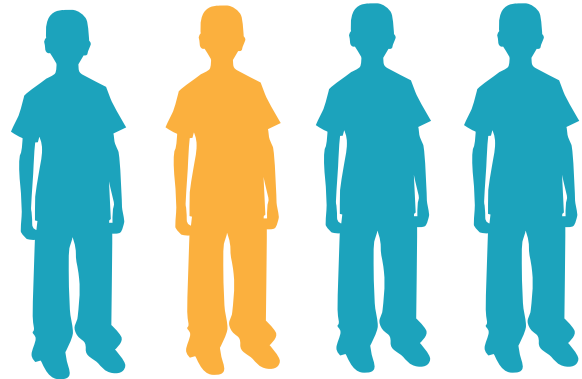
Ultimately, children just want to feel safe in schools and children and parents feel creating safe, nurturing schools requires more than physical protection from guns. Almost all of them consider close connections and trusting relationships with school staff critical components of school safety. About 90 percent of children and parents agree children need adults at school they can talk to about their problems.

Unfortunately, Black children are less likely to report trusting relationships with teachers, principals and school staff. When asked, “Not including your parents, who do you trust the most in your community?” about a third of White and Hispanic children mentioned teachers, principals and school staff, placing these individuals at the top of the list above even grandparents. Only 10 percent of Black children mentioned teachers, principals and school staff. Neighbors, friends, grandparents, aunts and uncles all ranked higher than school staff among Black children.

### **Children and Parents Agree Guns are Too Prevalent in America**

Given their worries about mass shootings, it is not surprising that a majority of America’s children and an even higher proportion of parents believe guns are too easy to get and there are too many guns in the United States. Nearly four times as many children agree as disagree that guns are too easy to get in America (53 percent to 14 percent) and more than three times as many parents agree as disagree (71 percent to 20 percent). Similarly, three times more children agree than disagree that there are too many guns in America (54 percent to 18 percent) as do twice as many parents (60 percent to 29 percent). Black children and parents are more likely to agree with each statement; 70 percent of Black children and 85 percent of Black parents agree it is too easy to get a gun in America and 72 percent of Black children and 78 percent of Black parents agree there are too many guns in America.

Parents and children are also much more likely to prioritize protecting children and adults from gun violence over protecting the right of people to own guns. When weighing these two policy goals, 44 percent of children ages 12-17 choose protecting children and adults from gun violence, while 7 percent choose protecting the right of people to own guns and 40 percent say these are equally important. Among parents, 39 percent name protecting children and adults from gun violence the more important priority, while 10 percent say protecting the right of people to own guns is more important and 49 percent say these are equally important. In each case, Black children and parents are more likely to prioritize protecting children and adults from gun violence than White children and parents.



**ONLY 1 IN 4 BLACK CHILDREN SUPPORT ARMING TEACHERS**

**When asked how they would change the world if they could make one change, children said:**

- “To not have to wake up and be scared to do normal things, like go to the movies because [someone] decided to shoot it up one night. Nowadays it’s scary to go anywhere because you never know what’s going to happen,” said a 16-year-old girl from New York.
- “I would change the policies about getting [a] gun. I would be more strict,” said a 10-year-old girl from North Carolina.

**When asked how they believe their worries about the world could be addressed, children said:**

- “There should be stricter gun control. Schools need to have better security,” said a 13-year-old girl from Indiana.
- “New laws are passed to help the schools be more secure and that guns are not sold to people without a thorough background check and training and registering and writing why they need to purchase a gun,” said a 15-year-old boy from California.
- “Listening to concerns of the children. Not letting certain people own guns,” said a 17-year-old boy from Texas.

Differing attitudes about guns among Black and White children and parents may be informed, in part, by differences in their personal experiences with guns. While Black children are less likely to have shot a gun, they are twice as likely to know someone who has been shot. White children are more likely to live in a gun-owning household than both Hispanic and Black children and are more likely to have shot a gun than Black children. Children in households with incomes of \$100,000 or higher were also more likely to have shot a gun than those in households with incomes below \$25,000.



**4x** MORE CHILDREN AGREE THAN DISAGREE IT'S TOO EASY TO GET A GUN

**Conclusion**

To respect the views and voices of our children and parents, we must work to keep children safe in their schools and neighborhoods and protect children, not guns. Most importantly, we must restore our children’s confidence that we as adults want them to be safe where they live and learn by:

- Making sure school safety plans developed across the country address the need for safe, nurturing schools that offer physical protection from guns as well as close connections and supportive relationships between staff and students.
- Eliminating zero tolerance discipline policies to focus on understanding children’s experiences rather than punishing their behaviors while carefully monitoring and responding to the impact of these reforms to ensure they benefit all students across racial, ethnic and income lines.

- Minimizing the threat of gang violence and mass shootings in children's neighborhoods and schools by restricting gun access for children under 21 and other high risk groups, implementing universal background checks, and banning assault weapons, high capacity magazines and bump stocks through common sense guns laws in state legislatures and Congress.

Let us heed our children's calls and guarantee every child in America the right to live, learn and grow up safely free from violence and fear.

### **About the Children's Defense Fund's Parent and Child Trends Survey**

The survey was conducted to amplify the voice of children and parents in the national conversation on a wide range of issues, from current worries to future hopes and dreams, and from emotional to physical safety and wellbeing.

The poll was conducted by YouGov May 8<sup>th</sup> through May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2018 among a sample of 5,500 children and parents, including 2,250 parents plus one child ages 6—17 from the same household. The margin of error is +/- 2%.

National representativeness was ensured by using sample-matching methodology and propensity score weighting. The YouGov sample-matching methodology is a three-step process designed to select representative samples from non-randomly selected pools of respondents, such as opt-in online panels. First, YouGov data scientists create a population frame using Census data, along with auxiliary data from high-quality government data sources. This frame becomes the target(s) for the recruitment. Second, the sample is recruited based on matching to the frame using a set of interlocking demographic variables. Third, once the survey data collection period has closed, the recruited sample is cleaned for quality control and then matched against the frame using the full set of variables. This effectively discards those respondents that are over represented in the sample. Finally, any differences between the survey data and sampling frame are adjusted using propensity score poststratification weights.

The survey included demographic and attitudinal questions for parents, with children's questions following parents' section. Parents were invited to sit with the child as he or she took the survey and help them read and understand questions, if needed. As might be expected, the likelihood of a child receiving help decreased with age, with about three in four children ages 6-8 having an adult sit with them during the survey, decreasing to one in four 15-17 year olds. To help ensure content was age appropriate, a pretest including over 250 parents plus a child was conducted March 29 to April 1, 2018.

### **About YouGov**

**YouGov** is a market research and data analytics firm with offices throughout the United States, the UK, Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia. YouGov's custom research specialists conduct a full spectrum of quantitative and qualitative research providing comprehensive market intelligence to the world's leading businesses and institutions. YouGov has a proven, published record of uniquely accurate data and actionable insights informing political, cultural and commercial organizations around the globe.



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