

## Safe and Supportive Schools: 20 Questions Every Parent Should Ask

Parents are essential partners in their child's education. They provide educators and school leaders with important information, perspective and insight on their children. Therefore, it is critical that parents have a seat at the table whenever decisions are made that impact their children, particularly on the issues of school safety and student support services.

It is important for parents to first learn and understand from school leadership what is happening at their child's school regarding school safety; however, many family members are not sure of what questions to ask.

**Here are questions you should ask your school principal to ensure your child is in a safe and supportive school.**

### School Safety Protocols

1. Does our school have a school safety team? If yes,  
→ Who is on it?

**Tip:** It should be an interdisciplinary team of school leaders, school employed mental health practitioners (e.g., school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers), parents and local law enforcement.

2. Does our school have a current school safety policy in place? If yes,  
→ Where can I review the current policy?  
→ What is included in the policy?  
→ How often is it evaluated and updated?

**Tip:** The policy should incorporate recommendations and best practices from the [Framework for Safe and Successful Schools](#).

3. Does our school have a threat assessment protocol? If yes,  
→ What does it include?  
→ Who is responsible for conducting the threat assessment?

**Tip:** A school employed mental health professional should be involved in the development and implementation of this protocol, which should include how to identify student threats, how to determine the seriousness of the threat, and how to develop

intervention plans that protect potential victims and address the underlying problem or conflict that stimulated the threatening behavior.

4. What type of building safety measures are in place?

**Tip:** Consider visitor check-in/check-out systems, proper lighting and secure access points to the school campus (e.g., parking lots, playgrounds, playing fields).

5. Does our school have other physical security measures in place? If yes,  
→ How are decisions made regarding physical security?

**Tip:** Decisions should be locally determined, collaborative and specifically include input from students, parents, educators, school leaders and the community.

6. Does our school have a school resource officer or other type of security personnel on school premises? If yes,  
→ What type of training have they received? Is it ongoing?  
→ Are they armed?  
→ What is their role and authority in the event of an actual emergency?

**Tip:** Roles and responsibilities should be clearly outlined in a Memorandum of Understanding.

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7. Are school safety drills conducted throughout the school year? If yes,

→ What can students and parents expect from these drills?

**Tip:** Schools should consider the age of their students when designing exercises and training.

8. In the event of an actual emergency

→ How are students evacuated from the building?

→ How are parents and students reunited?

**Tip:** There should be child release processes in place to ensure that no child is released to an unauthorized person.

### Student Behavioral and Mental Health Services

9. What type of student mental health and wellness support services are available?

**Tip:** Services should be integrated within the context of learning.

10. Are there schoolwide prevention/intervention programs in place to support a healthy school climate?

**Tip:** Programs should be evidence-based and increase students' understanding of behaviors and attitudes that lead to violence, how to resolve conflict peacefully and create a culture of respect and focus on learning.

11. How many school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, and school nurses does our school have?

**Tip:** Schools should be adequately staffed to provide the high quality, effective services in the school setting and connect students and families to the appropriate community services.

12. How do I refer my student for services if I feel they need additional support?

**Tip:** Your school's family liaison or your child's teacher can help connect you to the school-employed mental health professional.

13. Is training offered to all school-based employees on early intervention, prevention and access to school and community based mental health services?

**Tip:** Professional development should be offered for all school employees on an ongoing basis.

14. What are the policies regarding bullying, harassment and discipline?

**Tip:** Effective school discipline should teach and reinforce positive behaviors to replace negative ones.

15. In the event of an actual emergency, what crisis response services and psychological support measures are in place?

**Tip:** Local, state and national health agencies can provide immediate support to students and staff.

### Communication

16. Is there anonymous reporting and response procedures where students, staff, and families can report concerning behaviors or potential threats?

**Tip:** Providing a confidential way to "break the code of silence" is one of the most effective safety measures.

17. How are families and students notified about school safety drills conducted?

**Tip:** Schools should communicate information in advance to avoid confusion and concern

18. How are families notified if there is a school safety threat or incident?

**Tip:** Notification procedures should consider technology, language and communication barriers.

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19. How are parents informed if a teacher refers their child for behavioral or mental health services?

**Tip:** Schools should immediately request an in-person meeting with parents to discuss their concerns and an agreed upon course of action.

20. How can students and parents provide ongoing input on the school environment and climate?

**Tip:** In person forums are an effective way to provide feedback and input on current school safety measures and policies.

Check out our companion resource, **Safe and Supportive Schools—Mobilizing Family Stakeholders**, for three steps you can take to ensure your child is attending a safe and supportive school.

