

Social Justice Brief

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Tools for Social Workers to Prevent Gun Violence: Safe Storage of Guns in the Home, Extreme Risk Protection Orders, and Other Methods of Gun Violence Prevention

The primary mission
of the social work
profession is to enhance
human well-being and
help meet the basic
human needs of all
people, with particular
attention to the needs
and empowerment
of people who are
vulnerable, oppressed,
and living in poverty.

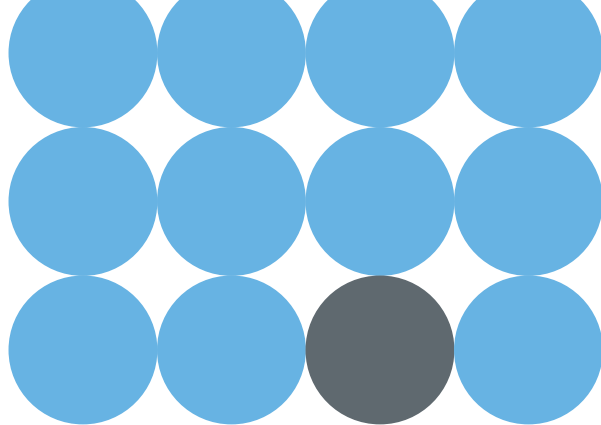
**Brady Campaign
& Brady Center**

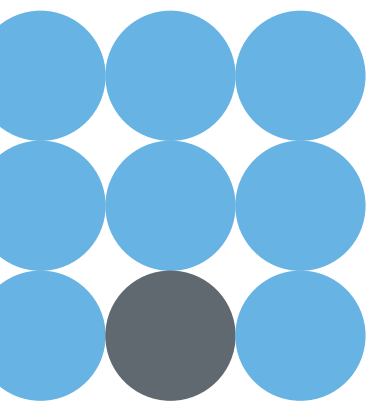
To Prevent Gun Violence

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The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is the largest membership organization of professional social workers in the world, with nearly 130,000 members. NASW works to enhance the professional growth and development of its members, to create and maintain professional standards, and to advance sound social policies.





Tools for Social Workers to Prevent Gun Violence: Safe Storage of Guns in the Home, Extreme Risk Protection Orders, and Other Methods of Gun Violence Prevention

In the 20 years since the mass shooting at Columbine high school in 1999, gun violence has gripped the nation's attention. Between 1999 and 2016, there have been over 572,000 gun-related deaths¹ in the United States—an average of 38,800 deaths per year. Of those numbers, 58.85% were suicides and 37.2% were homicides. From a public health and psychosocial standpoint, these statistics cannot and should not be ignored.

Recognizing our common commitment to push for a significant reduction in gun violence and accidental gun deaths, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the Brady Center are partnering on the issue of gun safety to prevent gun-related injuries and deaths. More specifically, Brady and NASW are collaborating on gun safety programs that can reduce gun deaths in the home caused by suicide, domestic violence, and accidental gun deaths and injuries.

Both organizations are committed to working at state and national levels to greatly reduce gun-related deaths and injuries. This brief was developed jointly by NASW and the Brady Center. The content in the brief reflects the anti-gun-violence and pro-gun safety values espoused by both organizations.

Background

Gun violence is one of the nation's most pervasive public health issues, affecting every segment of our society. Each year, an

average of 124,761 people are shot in the United States. Whereas headlines are filled with the tragedy of mass shootings, the reality is that communities across the country are forced to deal with gun violence on a daily basis. Each day, 342 people are injured or killed by gun violence. Forty-seven children and teenagers are shot each day, and of these, seven kids and teenagers will die from gun violence.²

Gun injuries, including many from assaults, sent 75,000³ children and teenagers to emergency rooms over nine years at a cost of almost \$3 billion. Eleven of every 100,000 children and teenagers treated in U.S. emergency rooms have gun-related injuries, and close to 8,300 kids are injured each year. Bullet-inflicted injuries can be physically and emotionally devastating—especially to children and teenagers. Just as important, the trauma of gun-related deaths and injuries can last a lifetime and affect not only the victims, but their families and communities.

Social workers—on the forefront of providing trauma-informed services—are intimately involved with many of these tragedies. Witnesses to gun violence injuries and deaths and their aftermath, social workers have the potential to play a powerful role in preventing gun violence through their actions and their role in educating the public and increasing public awareness about the devastating effects of gun violence.

Current Gun Safety Efforts

Since its founding, Brady's mission has been to create a safer America by ending America's gun violence epidemic. As the oldest and boldest organization in the gun violence prevention movement, Brady is one of the nation's leading subject matter experts on ending gun violence. Brady operates under the assumption that there are three key truths associated with gun violence:

- » Gun ownership demands responsibility.
- » Laws in existence must be upheld by those empowered to do that job.
- » Gun violence is a uniquely American problem. Only when Americans unite and work together will it be solved.

Similarly, NASW has a mission of seeking to enhance the effective functioning and well-being of individuals, families, and communities through its work and advocacy embracing policies and values that address national problems affecting large segments of our society. The pervasiveness of gun violence and gun-related injuries is a national problem that many agree is a major public health crisis.

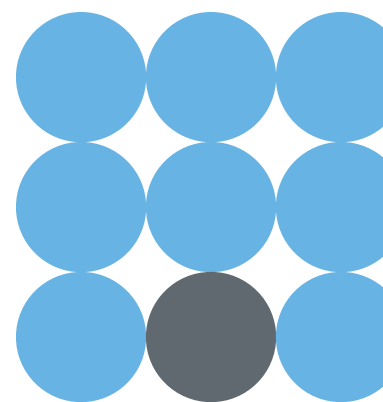
This brief will cover recommended programs to prevent gun deaths and injuries through innovative initiatives such as Brady's Asking Saves Kids (ASK) program and End Family Fire (EFF) campaign. We will also discuss several gun policy and legislative actions that are promising to reduce gun violence.

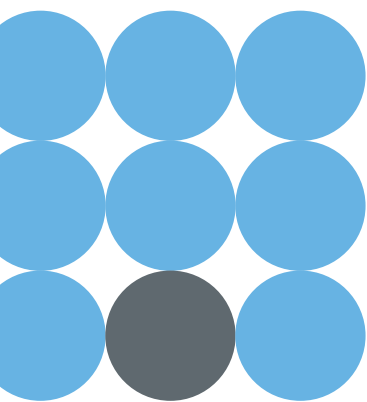
Asking about Safe Storage to End Family Fire

In America, one out of three homes with children has a gun, and 4.6 million children live in a home with a loaded, unlocked gun.⁴ Every year thousands of kids are killed, injured, or commit suicide as a result of access to an unsecured gun. Over 75% of school shootings are carried out with an unsecured gun from the home.

Shootings resulting from access to unsecured guns in the home are known collectively as *family fire*. The EFF campaign, spearheaded by Brady and supported by NASW and a broad coalition of organizations, raises awareness of the importance of safe storage in preventing these tragedies, by keeping guns in the home locked and unloaded.

ASK, a collaboration between Brady and the American Academy of Pediatrics, encourages the prevention of family fire through awareness and education. Pediatricians, parents, and other community members are encouraged to ask if there is an unlocked gun in the home of a child when assessing the home environment, whether through a wellness visit in a doctor's office, or when children visit the homes of their friends. This simple assessment question, which prioritizes prevention, awareness of the importance of





safe storage, and normalizing the conversation about the risks of guns in the home, has the power to reduce incidents of family fire. Implementing ASK assessments will save a child's life, and the lives of others.

Social workers—especially those whose practice includes home visits—are positioned to communicate with parents and primary care givers about creating a safe home environment that leads to preventing family fire incidents. This can be achieved by training social workers to ask key questions and share gun safety information with parents and primary caregivers in the household.

NASW and its members agree with Brady that discussions of family fire and safe storage of guns are important gun safety tools. NASW also agrees that it is within social workers' values to assist families in assessing the degree to which family members adhere to gun safety practices. It is important to mention that including gun safety assessments in a social work home visit does not mean that gun safety assessments will include anti-gun-ownership messages. Social workers—as is common practice—must clearly tell the heads of household that the assessment is for prevention of gun deaths and injuries.

Gun Safety Assessment Guidelines

The following guidelines for the assessment of safe storage of guns in the home has been developed by the American Academy of Pediatrics. NASW and Brady endorse and encourage social workers to ask the following questions, as part of a home environment assessment:

- » **Ask** patients about the presence of guns in the home:
Q1: "Is there a gun in the home?"
- » **Counsel** parents who keep guns to store them unloaded in a locked case, with the ammunition locked separately.
Q2: "And if so, is it stored locked, unloaded, and out of reach of children?"
- » **Share** best practices for safe storage of guns in the home: Counsel that while the safest home for children is one without a gun, safe storage practices can significantly reduce the risk of gun injury or death.
- » **Instruct** parents to ask if there is a gun in the house before sending their kids to play at a friends' home.
- » **Educate** families that suicide attempts with a gun are very likely to be fatal, and that the presence of a gun in the home is associated with increased risk of suicide.
- » **Ask** parents if they are aware of possible state laws that prohibit maintaining loaded and unlocked firearms in the home.
Q3: "Are you aware that your state strictly prohibits having loaded and unsecured guns in your house?"

Including these questions in every social worker's assessment protocol will have an immediate impact on the prevention of gun deaths, by restricting access to loaded guns in the home. It will also raise awareness of safe storage across the broader community, as education prompts parents and others to ask commensurate questions when entering the homes of others.

Extreme Risk Protection Order Laws: A Tool for Social Workers

An Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO) allows family members, law enforcement, and others to seek court permission to temporarily remove guns from a person in crisis and at risk of harming oneself and others, and prohibit the purchase of additional guns during that period. Having an ERPO in place reduces the likelihood that people in crisis will harm themselves or others with a gun while their behavior can be evaluated. ERPO laws have been passed and enacted in 12 states, including California, Oregon, Connecticut, and Washington state, and are currently under consideration in a number of others.

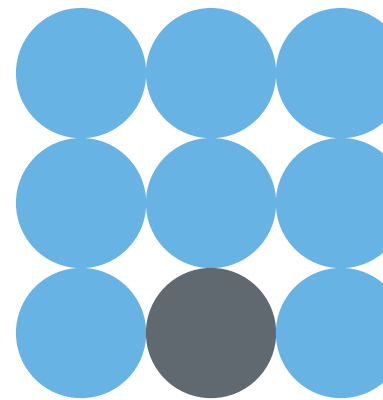
Temporarily removing guns from people in crisis can prevent **family fire incidents, suicide, school shootings, and intimate partner violence, which comprise approximately 60% of all gun deaths in the United States each year.** Gun suicides⁵ are far more common than gun-related homicides. Gun-related suicides accounted for 64% of all gun deaths in 2012—such suicides have become especially common among older white men. Suicide attempts are frequently impulsive decisions, and an easily-accessible firearm in the home triples the risk of death. Removing access to guns from these scenarios is proven to save lives.

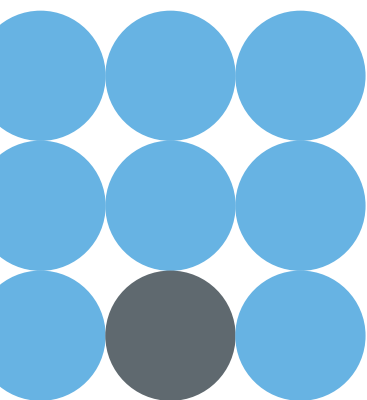
With respect to gun-related intimate partner violence, one out of every four women⁶ in the United States will be exposed to domestic violence in her lifetime. When the perpetrator uses a gun in committing such abuse, the consequences are tragic. Each year, nearly 900 women are killed with firearms in an intimate partner violence incident.

Compared with other methods of committing suicide, firearms are uniquely lethal: about 90% of gun suicide attempts are fatal, compared with just 3% when attempting suicide in other ways. A study evaluating Connecticut's extreme risk law found that a life was saved for each 10 to 20 ERPO warrants issued, and that many individuals received mental health care services they might not have otherwise accessed without the ERPO. In California's first year following enactment of an ERPO law, only 10 of the 86 temporary orders to remove a gun from a person in crisis were extended after a hearing; the majority of those who had a firearm removed by an extreme risk order regained the gun after the crisis had passed. (This example allays potential concerns that ERPOs would lead to permanent removal of individuals' weapons.)⁷

Since social workers generally provide family services, practitioners are often professionally involved with cases with family violence or the threat of family violence. In many situations, the social worker will have first-hand knowledge when there is high risk for family violence. Therefore, it is important that social workers who practice in states where there are ERPO laws become educated about the availability of a resources that could prevent gun-related and other forms of deadly family violence. Social workers are in the position to advise client families that they may request the courts to issue an ERPO by filing an official petition. The law defines a *family or household member* as:

- » person related by blood, marriage, or adoption to the respondent;
- » dating partner of the respondent;





- » person who has a child in common with the respondent, regardless of whether such person has been married to the respondent or has lived together with the respondent at any time;
- » person who resides or has resided with the respondent within the past year;
- » domestic partner of the respondent;
- » person who has a biological or legal parent–child relationship with the respondent, including stepparents and stepchildren and grandparents and grandchildren, or;
- » a person who is acting or has acted as the respondent’s legal guardian.

If you do not have the necessary relationship or are not comfortable asking the court for an order, you can tell police about the situation and they can assist in the process.⁸

Social workers (and their clients) must be made aware that ERPOs are often temporary protective orders that usually last until a hearing date. For the most part, hearing dates are required to be within 14 days of the date of the temporary order. If an ERPO is a permanent court order, it usually has to be renewed on a yearly basis.

The main point is that social workers have the capacity to serve as vehicles to educate the public, law enforcement, and the court system about ERPOs and their importance. Since passage of ERPO laws are a recent development in most states where the law has been enacted, education is key to broad use of this important gun violence prevention tool.

Other Legislative Measures to Prevent Gun Violence

Background Check Laws

Congress passed the Brady Bill in 1993, establishing a national background check system. The Brady Law, which requires a background check for anyone seeking to buy a handgun, has kept an estimated 3 million guns out of the hands of prohibited purchasers, including those who have been imprisoned for over a year or are fugitives from the law.

However, one in five guns in America are still sold without a background check, by sellers who bypass the system through one of several avenues, including buying guns over the Internet or at gun shows. While some states have expanded their background checks, approximately half of the population still live in states without these common-sense laws. Those convicted of gun crimes, assault, or domestic violence should no longer be able to purchase guns without passing a background check in any state: no loopholes and no exceptions. Guns should not be sold if a background check is still pending. Dangerous exceptions to the system that allow private sales to take place without conducting a background check at gun shows or on online sites put all Americans at risk.

NASW and the Brady Center call for comprehensive background checks on every gun sold in the United States. Doing so would keep guns out of the hands of those who should not access them and would prevent injuries and deaths from gun violence overall.

Tracking Crime Guns to Their Source: Holding “Bad Apple” Dealers Accountable

In the United States today, most federally licensed gun dealers engage in responsible sales practices; a whopping 90% of guns found at crime scenes are traced back to just 5% of gun dealers nationwide. Tracking down these irresponsible dealers, or “bad apples,” is crucial to the mission of preventing gun violence injuries and deaths by slowing the flow of crime guns to our communities.

Hampering communities’ ability to track this information, the 2005 Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act (PLCAA) prevents the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) from releasing data on crime guns and bad apple dealers. Localities, cities, and states including Chicago, Oakland, and the state of Massachusetts have circumvented the restraints of PLCAA by collecting, analyzing, and releasing crime gun tracking information at an aggregate level. This is the first crucial step to putting communities back in charge of vital information about negligent business practices that affect their safety.

NASW and the Brady Campaign support the transparency of records on crime gun tracking to expose bad apple gun dealers and support all efforts by the ATF to regulate and enforce negligent dealers, for the safety of our communities nationwide.

Assault Weapons Ban

NASW and the Brady Campaign support the renewal of an assault weapons ban. In 1994, Congress passed a ban on assault weapons, including semiautomatic firearms like the AR-15, a weapon used in many mass

shootings. When the ban expired in 2004, Congress did not renew it. Efforts to resurrect the ban were not successful.

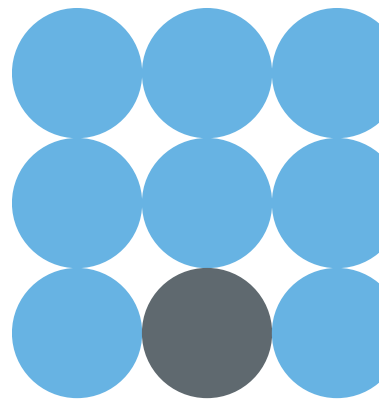
In America’s deadliest mass shootings, including Parkland, Las Vegas, Orlando, Sutherland Springs, Aurora, and Sandy Hook, the shooters have all used assault weapons and high-capacity magazines to massacre people. An AR-15 style rifle can be purchased in the United States today in as little as 25 minutes.

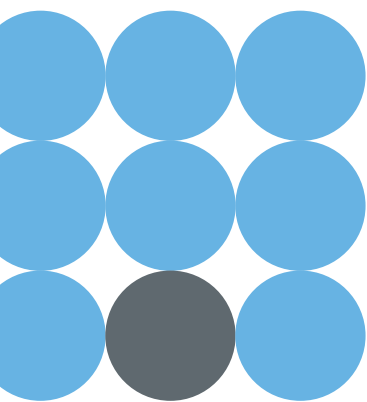
Legislation was introduced in October 2017 by Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), similar to the 1994 assault weapons ban, that would ban the sale, manufacture, transfer, and importation of over 200 military-style assault weapons by name, as well as outlaw any assault weapon that can accept a detachable magazine and one or more military characteristics.

It is the position of the Brady Campaign and NASW that weapons of war belong in military and police forces, not in our schools and churches. We therefore issue a joint call for a ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines.

Recommendations

In making recommendations on reducing family fire, it is only appropriate that we begin with the most vulnerable potential victims—children. The pediatric medical community has taken a strong stance on preventing gun violence in the home. For example, the American Academy of Pediatrics makes the following recommendations:





- » Stronger gun laws, including an effective assault weapons ban, mandatory background checks on all firearm purchases, and a ban on high-capacity ammunition magazines;
- » Research into the causes and prevention of gun violence;
- » Strengthening the quality of mental health care and access to services for children.⁹

Similarly, the University of California Davis Children's Hospital echoes the Brady Center's EFF guidelines by recommending that

- » parents keep firearms out of children's reach;
- » remove firearms from environments where children live and play;
- » firearms are always locked and unloaded, preferably in a gun safe;
- » ammunition be locked separately from firearms;
- » parents make sure their children understand that violence on TV and the movies is not real and that in real life, children are killed and badly hurt by guns; and
- » parents ask other parents if there are any unlocked guns in their homes before sending children over to to play.¹⁰

Recommendations for Social Workers

As clinicians,¹¹ social workers comprise the nation's largest professional discipline providing mental health care. In that licensed social workers can make psychiatric diagnoses, they are positioned to assess, prevent, and treat family crisis that could lead to gun violence. In addition, school-based social workers are trained and certified as violence prevention professionals.

For those reasons, the profession is considered to be primary responders in family fire situations. Given the deep public health concerns about gun violence as a whole, the following recommendations will assist social workers in augmenting family fire prevention best practices.

- » Become familiar with and integrate EFF guidelines in your family practice and interface with families during professional home visits.
- » Encourage schools of social work to develop curriculum content that includes gun-safety education and family fire prevention.
- » School social workers¹² should include friendly fire education protocols in student assessments and individual education planning.
- » NASW must continue to address gun violence as a public health priority.

Conclusion

The Brady Center has long been a leading voice in ending family fire. NASW's partnership with Brady will serve the important function of highlighting the social work profession's capacity to have a direct impact on preventing gun-related injuries and deaths within a family setting.

The urgency of the gun violence public health epidemic and its impact on families and communities has brought this issue to the forefront as a policy priority for NASW and the constituencies it serves. Incorporating questions about the safe storage of guns in the home into safety and environmental assessments and the use of ERPO laws are tools that will help social workers prevent

incidents of family fire. Advocating for stronger background checks on gun sales, an assault weapons ban, and the tracking of crime guns and sales standards for gun dealers are measures that will stem the tide of gun violence.

NASW and the Brady Campaign stand together with social workers across the United States in advocating for the prevention of the 124,761 injuries and deaths of Americans every year due to gun violence, and call for communities and legislators to join us in preventing gun violence tragedies that happen each day across the country.

Footnotes

¹ Pro-Cin.org. (2018, August). *US gun deaths by year: Suicides, homicides, unintentional deaths, legal intervention deaths, deaths from undetermined consequences*. Retrieved from <https://gun-control.procon.org/view.resource.php?resourceID=006094>

² The Brady Center averaged the most recent five years of complete data from death certificates available via CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control's Web-based Injury Statistics Query and Reporting System, www.cdc.gov/injury/wisqars/index.html. Brady Center. (2018). *There are too many victims of gun violence. As a nation, we have had #enough*. Retrieved from www.bradycampaign.org/sites/default/files/Brady-Campaign-5Year-Gun-Deaths-Injuries-Stats_08-23-2018.pdf

³ Associated Press (2018, October 29). *Guns send over 8,000 US kids to ER each year, analysis says*. Retrieved from <https://apnews.com/b806812a8f0945128b4c5e47a9f3c739>

⁴ Azrael, D., Cohen, J., Salhi, C., & Miller, M. (2018). "Firearm storage in gun-owning households with children: Results of a 2015 National Survey." *Journal of Urban Health*, 95, 295–304. Retrieved from www.thetrace.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Firearm-Storage-in-Households-with-Children_JUH.pdf

⁵ Millman, J. (2015, January 14). Many more people are dying from gun suicides than gun-related homicides [Wonkblog]. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/01/14/many-more-people-are-dying-from-gun-suicides-than-homicides/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.a1072d2f3a2a

⁶ National Council of Jewish Women. (2018, August). *The intersection of guns and intimate partner violence*. Retrieved from www.ncjw.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/The-Intersection-of-Guns-and-IPV.pdf

⁷ Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence. (2017, November). *The lifesaving gun law you've never heard of*. Retrieved from www.bradycampaign.org/sites/default/files/ERPO-Fact-Sheet_08-2017.pdf

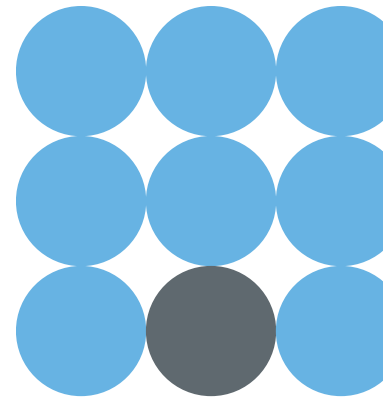
⁸ Alliance for Gun Responsibility Foundation. (n.d.). *FAQ: extreme risk protection orders*. Retrieved from <https://foundation.gunresponsibility.org/faq-extreme-risk-protection-orders/>

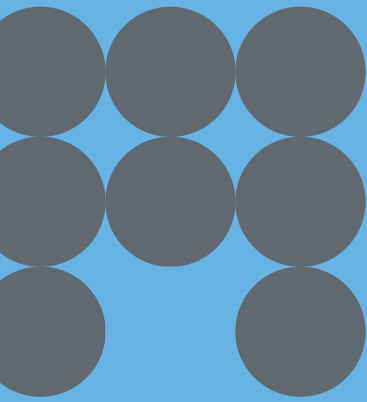
⁹ American Academy of Pediatrics. (2018). *Gun violence prevention: Federal priorities to keep children safe*. Retrieved from www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/federal-advocacy/Pages/AAP-FederalGunViolencePreventionRecommendations-toWhiteHouse.aspx

¹⁰ University of California Davis. (2017, August). *Gun safety recommendations for parents*. Retrieved from <https://health.ucdavis.edu/publish/news/newsroom/12250>

¹¹ Washington Square News. (2013, March). *Social workers can reduce more than just gun violence*. Retrieved from <https://nyunews.com/2013/03/14/braman/>

¹² Council on Social Work Education. (n.d.). *Role of social work education in school safety and gun violence prevention*. Retrieved from www.cswe.org/Advocacy-Policy/SWEdu_School_Safety_GunViolence_2018.aspx





NASW Resources

NASW » [SocialWorkers.org](https://www.socialworkers.org)

NASW Foundation » [NASWFoundation.org](https://www.naswfoundation.org)

NASW Press » [NASWPress.org](https://www.naswpress.org)

NASW Assurance Services, Inc. » [NASWAssurance.org](https://www.naswassurance.org)

NASW Center for Workforce Studies » [Workforce.SocialWorkers.org](https://www.workforce.socialworkers.org)

Help Starts Here » [HelpStartsHere.org](https://www.helpstartshere.org)

Social Work Reinvestment Initiative » [SocialWorkReinvestment.org](https://www.socialworkreinvestment.org)

Social Work Policy Institute » [SocialWorkPolicy.org](https://www.socialworkpolicy.org)

Social Work Portal » [SocialWorkers.org/swportal](https://www.socialworkers.org/swportal)

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