

## Lesson 3: School Safety and Security Toolkit

**Host:** Welcome back to our final segment with Mike McCarty from SafeHiring Solutions and Safe Visitor. Our school audience is probably going to be most interested in this part of our conversation because you're going to describe some major tools that should be at the top of their safety and security tool kit.

**Mike McCarty:** The toolkit's going to be big. It's a big bag, because first we have to understand that school security, it's an ongoing process. This is not a carpenter that comes in with a tool kit, gives you everything you need immediately and walks away in two months and you're done. This is ongoing, everlasting process. But some of the key things that need to be in the tool kit are, obviously, your policies and procedures. We've talked a lot about that. The vulnerability assessment is the main component. Could be social media monitoring tools, emergency communication tools.

When I talk about emergency communication, there's some new tools that are coming out on the market that actually — a school can run a mobile application, employees can place this application on their phone. Law enforcement officers, I think there's some 50,000, one of them we've evaluated already, have this mobile application on their phones on duty, off duty. In the crisis situation, if they are to hit a button, then this goes out to anybody that's geo-graphed, geo-fenced in an area so they can have quicker response times. Anonymous tip lines, see something, say something. There are companies, many of them out here already exist in the marketplace where I can text in because we have to put it in a medium that kids are going to use. My kids would rather text me from the other room than to walk in and ask me for something. So, I need to be able to anonymously say, "Hey, I heard this or I saw this."

I know we saw an incident in Georgia that was prevented based on a student making an anonymous tip. And with that anonymous tip, they went and searched a locker and found a weapon. So, these tools help, but they have to be anonymous. They also allow me to be able to communicate if I'm feeling depressed or potentially suicidal. So we've seen some of these tools that now are evolving into connecting with your crisis or care team creating kind of an incident report that comes in, if it's real time, based on certain words, can immediately connect them with a crisis team. So those communication tools, and I saw one the other day where they created it with Google themselves. I don't know how they did it, I just saw it on a survey that we conducted. So it doesn't mean you have to buy one, but create a medium for them to report.

Background checks. What are you doing? Just to say, you're doing background checks, that's not enough. What type of background checks, how frequently, what level? When you're talking about volunteers or contractors having contact with your students — how are you vetting them? How are you screening them? Are you going with a \$7 background check? That's probably not the tool that's going to combat what needs to happen. I would also say reference checks need to be in that. Why would I say reference checks? Well, 80%

of sex offenders in the United States don't have a criminal history. So, I'm not going to uncover them with a criminal check alone and so I need other tools to be able to uncover that. These are the kind of things — access control systems, IP cameras, not all of these are going to be things you implement today.

Matter of fact, when we look at a toolkit, there's a whole group of things that we would say, here's where you want to start based on some recommendations. And these are things you can do tomorrow because they're free. Having an adult at the front door, one way in one way out so you have one single access point. That was the problem in Parkland, you had multiple ways in all doors opened up in between classes. Trying to manage that is impossible. And so looking at any kind of environmental design around your front door, what may look really pretty, may also hinder security, big bushes, tall bushes, places where people can hide within those bushes, so looking at some of the environmental designs.

How do you control people when they walk in the front door? One of the things in a tool kit that you want to take a look at is if your school, if you walk in the front door and you're immediately in the swimming pool, so to speak, there's no barriers. As long term, how do we barrier off that front entryway to where we let you through one set of doors, but you're not getting to the kids until we allow you into those next set of doors or what barriers can we create? So those are the kind of things that are in this security tool kit, and they range from things we can do today for free to things that are going to take years potentially, and an architect to be able to change on a design feature.

**Host:** I want to expand a little more on background checks and screening. I know this is an area your team is pretty passionate about. What advice would you give schools?

**Mike McCarty:** You haven't heard me say anything about liability. And one of the reasons I haven't talked anything about liability is because we really approach this from a moral standpoint. You have a moral obligation, I don't care if you're a private or a public school, you've got a mission to protect these children in the school. And so, if that threshold of protection is only being driven by liability, you're going to fall low on this scale. And what we want to talk through is with those organizations that are really mission-driven about protecting children, protecting their school, their team, here's where you need to start. Very difficult with a \$7 background check. Very difficult to run a sex offender registry check and be a hundred percent certain somebody walking through your door is not a sex offender. Why? Because it depends what part of the country you're in. Indiana, where we sit again, many sex offenders only required to register for 10 years and they can fall off the registry.

You go to Massachusetts, they have three classifications on their sex offender registry, not all three classifications actually report to the sex offender registry. So those tools are highly, they're not going to be competitive products for keeping these type of people out of your organization. And so, no, you can't do it for \$7. What we can do is show you what a best practice is. You can go on our website right now and download "10 things you need to know before you hire a background screening firm." And it doesn't tell you who to hire, what it tells you, these are the questions you need to ask and they need to be able to answer these questions or you need to move on to the next provider.

**Host:** Is having local law enforcement on campus to help with event security or things like carpool or employing a School Resource Officer also part of the tool kit?

**Mike McCarty:** Yeah. And you bring up a good point or I had a thought when you talk about having officers in the school, especially from the private school side where the SRO programs aren't nearly as big as they are in a public school environment. We've been helping some private schools adopt those programs. We've been working with NASRO and how do you do that,

and thinking outside the box a little bit, and how do you create an environment where you have even retirees that become special deputies on a local department so they're still now activated and allowed to carry weapons and convert them to school resource officers. So looking and thinking outside the box, if you're a school that's sitting here today and say, we don't even have an officer in the school, is just thinking outside the box a little bit and recognizing how we can do this. And it's a little different than creating that relationship that a public school might have with the local police, because that one's usually a 50/50 split. The school pays 50% of the police officer and the agency pays 50%. So that can get a little bit expensive, but there's ways of doing that.

**Host:** We've talked about controlled access, law enforcement and resource officers, what's the next thing I should have in my tool kit?

**Mike McCarty:** In those high traffic times in the morning and afternoon, it's the presence. It's the same thing I was driving through North Carolina and tapped the brakes because evidently I was speeding and because I saw the car in the median. Well, there wasn't anybody in the car. I thought, ah, that's really smart. Just the presence of that car. And we're all tapping our brakes. Seeing somebody standing in front of that door, even if it's not a uniformed police officer, changes my mindset completely. And so that's what we're talking about, one way in, one way out and having an adult presence during those passing periods. And that sounds easier than it is to do because a lot of times you're teaching. Grabbing you after class, asking you a question, being in the hallways, being at those doors, that presence alone is a mitigator.

**Host:** What can school leaders ask of parents and area businesses regarding helping them achieve greater security?

**Mike McCarty:** Good question. Two parts. The businesses can be a great set of eyes. And I know one of the security directors, large public school that we work with, often talks about the relationship she's building with businesses that are actually next door to school buildings that they have. They see things. If they see things that are anomalies, that they don't look right, they're calling her and letting her know, and so it's an extra set of eyes. Businesses can also be engaged to help with the toolkit. They have a huge vested interest in schools in their community. And so oftentimes we don't think about "how do I pay for IP cameras or social media monitoring solutions?" A lot of times you can tap into local businesses that are more than willing, philanthropically, to support those kind of safety measures for the school.

Parents, this is an important piece, I think, to the whole security process is one, engaging the parents. How do you communicate with the parents? They're scared. They really are. Going back into school session this year, parents are nervous. They're nervous because of the incidents that happened back in late winter, in the spring. And so being able to host meetings as an administrator, bringing in your law enforcement officers that are your partners, explaining what you're doing right now, where you're going, what you're looking at. And also telling them, I can't tell you everything we're doing because there's some things we're doing that, if I tell you, will totally turn the process into a process that no longer works.

Parents also can become advocates. I've seen it in communities recently where a grandmother in a community is now the one raising funds because she thinks that every school, not only in the district where her grandkids are at, but now she's doing it throughout the whole county. She thinks every one of those schools needs to have metal detectors. And she's the one raising the funds for those metal detectors. And so parents need to be engaged. I would also say, engage your students. Students need to play an active part in this

security process. We're working with a school right now that had an active shooter incident this year and they're creating a student advisory group. Why? Those kids know everything that's happening in this school. If I ask my kids questions, they know everything that's happening at school. None of us know these things. And so really engaging business, parents, and the students, and I think you've just hit the trifecta right there.

**Host:**

Thank you, Mike. This wraps up our school safety and security series on Left of Bang. Mike, we're extremely blessed to have had you with us today. And School teams, thank you for joining us and be sure to check out the additional resources we've included on this webpage from the Brotherhood Mutual Safety Library.

*The information provided in this audiocast series and by our guest speaker is intended to be helpful, but does not constitute legal advice and is not a substitute for legal advice from a licensed attorney in your area. Event participants are encouraged to regularly consult with a local attorney as part of your risk management program.*

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