

Security Controls For Your School's Main Office

For most schools, the main office is the 'command center' of your school. It is in the central workplace where:

- School administrators have their offices
- Entrance cameras and buzzer systems are monitored
- Bomb threats will be received by the school district
- Visitors should be required to check in
- Confrontations may take place with upset parents
- Money may be secured
- Medications may be secured and distributed

With these potential security concerns in mind, consider these main office best practices:

Never divulge any information about your school's crisis procedures to anyone without verifying their credentials.

If an unknown individual makes such a request, simply state that the school has emergency response procedures but we cannot discuss them. Better yet, refer them to your district administrator.

Ensure your bomb threat and harassing phone call protocol checklist is readily available for your school's office personnel.

Keep an eye on your video security monitors.

Oftentimes, the security monitor is located in another room and cannot be observed by office staff. The security monitors should be centrally located to ensure that multiple office staff members are able to view the monitors at all times.

Position video security cameras so your front desk personnel can see the entire body of the visitor.

Security cameras that only produce 'face shots' of the visitor are of little use in determining if the visitor is carrying something in their hands or under their clothing – such as a weapon.

Never leave money or other valuables on or near the main office countertop.

Oftentimes when entering a school's main office, I have observed bank money bags, purses, and other valuables lying out in the open. These items could be stolen by a quick handed visitor or stranger.



Identify a safe room where school administrators and front office personnel will go during an emergency situation.

The role of a safe room is to provide a safe place which your administrators and front office personnel will attempt to occupy during an emergency or crisis situation. This ‘command center’ should be securable, out of direct sight, have communication access (computer and cell phone), and be known by law enforcement

Clearly label your main office so visitors and strangers know where to go when entering your school.

I have visited too many schools where the main office was not labeled or the office signs were not easily recognizable.

Never cover your office windows with paper, posters, or decorations.

This is especially important if your office area faces a main hallway or the commons area.

Ask all visitors to provide photo identification to verify their identity.

Use a brightly colored visitor sign-in/sign-out book in your main office.

All visitors are required to sign in and out – no exceptions.

Require visitors to leave their driver’s license or car keys at the office when signing in.

This will ensure the visitor returns to main office when leaving the school.

Require your visitors to wear brightly colored, easily identifiable badges.

A 5”x7” brightly colored (orange/lime green) badge worn around the visitor’s neck will allow school staff to identify approved visitors from a distance.

Don’t be afraid to say ‘no’ to a visitor’s request.

If the visitor is dropping off an item for a student, the visitor doesn’t have to take it to the classroom; that’s a duty for the hall monitor.

Call a student to the office to see a visitor — don’t send the visitor to the student.

Provide a duress alarm or panic button for the school receptionists.

A duress alarm could be added to your existing alarm system to provide a signal to several locations, such as the principal’s office, the police department or the school resource officer.

WARNING SIGNS THAT SOMEONE IS CARRYING A WEAPON

Learn to recognize some of the warning signs that a student/visitor may be carrying or concealing a weapon on their body:

- During a routine security check or confrontation with the student, the individual is seen feeling their body to ensure the weapon is in place.
- Look for a sag in the individual’s jacket or coat. The pocket of the jacket where the weapon is stored may hang lower than the other side.
- The individual’s clothing appears out of place — they are wearing clothing that appears too warm for the weather. The clothing may provide a hiding space for a weapon.



- The individual uses just one hand to perform routine tasks. This is an attempt to keep one hand free to handle the weapon.
- The individual wears just one glove. Again, one hand is left free to handle a weapon.
- A part of the weapon is visible. The barrel of a gun may be seen protruding from beneath a coat, the tip of a knife can be seen sticking out of a sleeve, etc.
- The individual walks with an unnatural gait — not swinging their arm on the side of the body where the weapon is located. They may be holding a weapon in place to prevent it from falling.
- The individual ‘palms’ the weapon in the palm of their hand in preparation for ready use.
- The individual turns their body away from a school authority figure to hide or protect a concealed weapon. This is a practice commonly called ‘blading.’

DEALING WITH COMBATIVE STUDENTS, VISITORS, OR STRANGERS

Always attempt to project a calm image to everyone. Remaining calm in both your physical actions and verbal discussions with individuals may defuse the situation.

Pause and think before reacting to a combative individual’s actions. If the person uses inappropriate language or begins calling you names, don’t react aggressively; this may only serve to escalate the person’s aggression.

Try not to take an aggressive individual’s behavior personally. Remember, at the verbal and physical aggression stages, the person may be at a loss for self-control. Inappropriate language or body gestures may take place — don’t let this bother you.

Use breakaway safety lanyards if your employees wear their identification badges around their neck. Breakaway lanyards utilize a plastic clasp or a Velcro strip that will easily open if the lanyard is caught or pulled by a combative person.

Avoid wearing dangling jewelry, earrings, necklaces, etc. An aggressive person may grab a necklace and try to choke you with it.

Remove any objects from the immediate area that could be used as weapons against you.

Don’t provide aggressive individuals easy access to weapons such as scissors, staplers, letter openers, paper weights, etc. Remove these items from your desk top.

During any type of confrontation, provide the individual adequate personal space. At a minimum, 18 inches to 3 feet should be maintained between the teacher and an aggressive person.

If an individual’s behavior suddenly becomes physical, give them a lot of personal space. Closing in or trying to restrain the person usually ends badly and will only escalate unsafe behavior.

When talking to an individual, don’t hover over them. Lower yourself to the person’s level; this may mean leaning on a filing cabinet or sitting on the edge of a table or desk to project a calm image.



Never startle a disruptive person from behind. Stay in the plain view of the aggressive person and present yourself in a calm, rational manner. Many school employees have been injured when a combative person was startled from behind resulting in the person striking the school employee.

Do not be within arm's reach of a potentially violent or aggressive person. Position yourself out of the person's reach — out of the 'line of fire.'

Whenever possible, avoid face-to-face, eye-to-eye, toe-to-toe interaction with a potentially violent or aggressive person.

Attempt to take a 'supportive stance' towards the aggressive person. Ensure that you are at least one leg length away, off to the side, and at angle to the person. When performed properly, a supportive stance doesn't invade the person's personal space, avoids the 'challenge position' and provides less chance of physical injury to the person or yourself.

Always angle your body away from the combative person's dominant hand. Whenever possible, take mental notes — does the person write with their right or left hand? A right handed writer probably has a dominant right hand. Another simple tip to remember: most people wear a wrist watch on their non-dominant hand.

Always be aware of your voice — don't speak too loud or too fast.

Control your facial gestures. Keep your facial expressions calm if at all possible. A frown or scowl may be portrayed as a feeling of dislike or displeasure. A straight facial expression may provide no evidence of interest. A wince portrays sudden dislike or pain.

Maintain eye contact at all times when talking with a combative person. The person may get a sense of confidence that you are truly listening to them. Constant eye contact will also allow you to spot some of the common head and body movements that you would have surely missed if you were looking somewhere else.

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About M3

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