

# COMMON SENSE SUGGESTIONS FOR REDUCING FIREARM FATALITIES

While there is strong disagreement on both the scope of the problem and the solutions needed, there are some steps short of bans or additional regulations that we should consider to reduce the number of mass shootings or at least lessen the casualty count when they occur. To implement them, however, the dueling advocates will need to temporarily mute the volume, set aside politics, dial down the rhetoric, focus on facts and use their common sense.

The following possibilities are focused primarily on schools, but would work equally well for many offices and other public facilities. Some of them will be controversial, but all deserve discussion and consideration.

1. Start by putting metal detectors in every school. We use them to protect our courthouses, government buildings, airports, sports stadiums and everything else we deem important. Why not our children?

Nobody wants to turn our schools into fortresses, but much of life involves a balancing of risks and inconveniences – and that is especially true in matters of security. Just look at what we endure for airline travel. We have made a collective decision that the potential risk presented by a few devoted terrorists is worth the indignities routinely inflicted upon us by TSA. What level of inconvenience is appropriate to maximize the safety of our children?

2. Enforce existing laws. As noted above, a number of mass shooters should not have been able to purchase firearms but were allowed to because of a failure to properly enforce existing laws. Obtaining full and complete reporting by states, tribal authorities and federal agencies to existing

databases is essential for any background check program to work. Reporting of mental health commitments is critical and we also need to consider expanded reporting of mental health issues consistent with individual privacy rights.

3. Reinforce doors, window, locks, etc. in schools and other public buildings. It does no good for students to barricade themselves behind a door that doesn't lock or one that a shooter can easily fire through. In the recent Parkland shooting, the gunman attempted to fire at students fleeing outside by shooting through windows, but was unable to do so because of the reinforced glass.
4. Practice active shooter drills. Schools regularly practice fire and tornado preparedness, but what students should do in the event of an active shooter situation also should be taught and rehearsed. Students should be taught practical and facility specific measures on how and where to run, hide or fight when confronted with such a situation. Practical advice like silencing cell phones and how to properly respond when police arrive should be part of the instruction.
5. Take tips seriously and investigate them. We now know that multiple warnings were ignored that potentially could have prevented the recent Parkland school shooting. Tips need to be taken seriously and procedures need to be in place to insure that they are investigated.
6. Regulate or ban Bump Stocks. These devices use a rifle's recoil to allow a user to rapidly pull the trigger and achieve a rate of fire close to that of a fully automatic firearm. As with fully automatic firearms, that increased rate of fire comes with trade-offs in accuracy and the rapid depletion of ammunition. Because they effectively convert a legal semi-automatic firearm into something close to an illegal fully automatic firearm, legislation regulating or banning their sale should be considered.

7. Expanded screening and treatment of mental illness. The data is clear on the link between mass shootings, gun homicides and mental illness. Expanded access to mental health care and treatment would almost certainly reduce gun violence and may in fact be the most successful way of reducing the incidence of mass shooting events. Of course, a related issue is the reporting of mental health issues to authorities and the degree or nature of mental health impairment that should disqualify one from purchasing a firearm. That particular debate is a complex one and beyond the scope of this paper.

*Now for the ones likely to generate controversy...*

8. Recruit and utilize retired military and law enforcement personnel. There are many such individuals in every community and they have the skills and experience to manage access points, check backpacks, and where needed engage threats ranging from firearms to knives to assaults. Many already own, are trained in the proper use of, and are permitted to carry firearms. As with metal detectors, we use trained and armed security personnel to protect our courthouses, government buildings, airports, sports stadiums, celebrities, etc. Why not our children?
9. Train and arm appropriate school personnel. Those school personnel who are willing and capable could be properly trained and permitted to carry firearms. However heroic the act of a Coach shielding students with his body may be, a properly trained Coach instead could be firing back at the shooter and possibly saving not only his life but the lives of many other students in the process. Negative response to this suggestion is driven largely by preconceived stereotypes and a fundamental misperception of what is being proposed. Proponents are not suggesting the random arming of unqualified teachers. Participants would be required to undergo rigorous training that includes both classroom and firing range instruction by certified trainers. Regular re-certification of knowledge and skills would be

mandatory, and participants would be required to obtain a concealed carry permit for the jurisdiction. Finally, they would need to be issued a special identification and badge to show to police and other first responders who otherwise might mistake them for an assailant.

Skeptics should review the results of a 2015 study published in the International Journal of Police Science and Management. The goal of the study was to compare the shooting accuracy of police officers who had completed a standard firearms training course with that of intermediate (recreational experience) and novice (minimal/no experience) shooters to evaluate how the skills of the officers compared to what they might experience when facing a real world adversary. Study participants were drawn from police recruits who had completed a standard 40 hour firearms training course and those who had not. Recruits in the latter group were further classified as either intermediate or novice depending on their previous hunting or recreational firearms experience. The intermediate category also included recruits with military firearms training while recruits who had fired a weapon only once or twice were placed in the novice category.

Recruits were taken to a firing range and instructed to shoot at human silhouette targets as rapidly and accurately as possible, and analysis of the results focused on hit percentages at various distances. At all distances analyzed, the expert and intermediate groups shot more accurately than the novice group, but ***there was no significant difference in accuracy between the expert and intermediate group at any distance.***

Moreover, the difference from the novice group was not nearly as great as the researchers expected. At typical gunfight distances between 3 to 15 feet,<sup>\*</sup> novice shooters had a hit accuracy of 75% compared to 84% and 88% for intermediate and expert shooters respectively; a difference of only 13%. The takeaway is that even moderately trained

school personnel are likely to shoot nearly as accurately as trained police officers at distances that matter. Lewinski W J, et al., *The real risks during deadly police shootouts: Accuracy of the naive shooter*, International Journal of Police Science and Management, Vol. 17(2) 117-127 (2015) [\[REF LINK\]](#).

\*NYPD data from 2011-12 shows that 47% of conflicts in which officers fired their weapons happened within that 3 to 15 foot range. Kelly RW, Annual firearms discharge report. New York City Police Department. 2011 [\[REF LINK\]](#). 2012 [\[REF LINK\]](#).

10. Advertise what you are doing. Instead of posting signs telling shooters they are entering a “Gun Free Zone”, let them know that measures are in place to stop, capture and even kill them. Make the obstacles they will encounter both prominent with obvious security personnel, cameras and metal detectors, but also hidden with large signs warning of plain clothes armed security and staff and concealed security cameras. High quality hardware on windows and doors and labels proclaiming that they are bullet-resistant contribute to an aura of preparedness. The point is to make it clear to a potential shooter that the chances of being caught, captured or killed are simply too great to risk.
11. Ban sales to those on Terrorist Watch Lists. You read that correctly. Current law does not prohibit such sales and the watch list is not a part of the instant background check database. The Pulse Nightclub shooter was on the Watch List but was allowed to legally purchase the firearms used in the shooting. Proposals to ban such sales have failed because proponents of the legislation have bundled the ban with additional provisions other lawmakers found unacceptable. This proposal is not without controversy and should be thoroughly discussed and debated before being put to a vote. As with the no-fly list, it is not clear exactly how one is placed on the list by the government or how one’s name can be removed from the list. To strip someone

of a right without knowing the criteria used to categorize them as a suspected terrorist is problematic, and the matter should be carefully discussed before imposing such a ban.

12. Ban sales to those convicted of violent misdemeanors or domestic violence. There is some evidence to suggest that persons convicted of either offense are statistically more likely to engage in gun violence. The issue deserves more study and consideration.

Some items in this list were adapted in part from *7 Simple Steps to Eliminate School Shootings Overnight*, Kevin McCullough, Townhall.com, February 18, 2018 [[REF LINK](#)].

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**Author Note:** Like many young men growing up in the rural South, the author owned a .22 caliber rifle and a shotgun, both of which were used for hunting and sport shooting. He no longer hunts and has passed the .22 rifle on to his son, but he still owns firearms for recreation and personal defense. He is not a member of the NRA and has no vested interest in the gun debate, but is tired of hearing heated arguments presented on both sides of the issue without bothering to learn the facts.