



Numerous School Shooting Plots Uncovered in Recent Days

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BETTY NGUYEN, CNN ANCHOR: That's not all. In Mississippi a nightmare revisited. Two Pearl Junior High School students are charged with making threatening statements about classmates. One message on the Web site Zenga warns students to stay away from school May 1st.

The police chief says Luke Woodham was mentioned in the messages. He is in prison for life for killing his mother and then going on a rampage at Pearl High School in 1997. Two classmates were killed and seven others wounded.

In North Carolina, a seventeen year old boy is in custody, accused of holding a teacher and a female student hostage. That standoff at East Chapel Hill High School lasted about an hour. Police say the teenager fired his shotgun twice before escaping. No one was hurt. He was found a short time later by his parents who took him to a hospital and called police.

Acting out in school is one thing, planning to harm teachers and classmates quite another. As you have heard, that is what authorities from Mississippi to Alaska say teenagers have been plotting.

What is behind this anger? **Joining us from Springfield, Massachusetts, is Dr. Frank Sacco**, he is a child and family mental health expert and also a consultant to the FBI. We appreciate your time today.

I have to ask you, what is behind the anger? Kansas, Alaska, Washington, North Carolina, what's prompting all of these cases?

DR. FRANK SACCO, MENTAL HEALTH EXPERT: What we've discovered is that these kids are being pressurized by social aggression. They're trying to fit in. They're being excluded, and in the process of this, they're being disconnected from the mainstream of the school network.

So it's compressed humiliation from trying to fit in that then gets disengaged. Often these kids get on to virtual -- most of these kids will go onto the Internet and find hate groups and other people who will connect to their message of being humiliated and shamed at school.

NGUYEN: You know, school is tough. We all know that. We know that kids can be cruel. We have been there. Why now? It seems like toward the end of the school year, there are pranks but plots to kill other students? Is it something that happens this the time of the year, towards the end of the school year?

SACCO: This is the time. It's Hitler's birthday and it is a copycat phenomenon that happens around Columbine and it's about the buildup of social pressure. Just like in suicide, most of these kids die in the shootings. These kids get shamed to the point where they can't take it, and the victim becomes the victimizer. It shifts into the avenging angel scenario.

NGUYEN: Are there some outlying factors. Are kids more likely to act on that violence these days than in the past? Do other things contribute to it, like video games and movies and television, things that have a lot of violence?

SACCO: The primary fact -- of course, they don't help. Really what you're talking about now is that American high schools have become vicious social architectures. Kids are trying desperately using brand names to fit in. When they don't fit in, they disconnect.

Generally they'll get access to weapons at home. They may connect with other friends who are having similar feelings. I think the pressure with the Internet, now they can get online and instead of one phone call telling rumors or bad stories about another, they can get on the Internet now and blast everybody. It's really much more compressed social aggression I think now than before.

NGUYEN: Where are these kids getting these guns? In the Kansas case in particular, one student's bedroom, had guns, ammunition, knives, things of that sort. Where are these kids getting these guns?

SACCO: The FBI and Secret Service have studied this phenomenon. In three out of the four cases, guns come from the family.

NGUYEN: Really? Are the parents the last to know.

SACCO: Yes. Dismissiveness, both at school and home is a key ingredient in the evolution of these instances. In the cases you're talking about, these things were stopped. There was no violence. Usually the kids tip someone off, like in suicide. There's usually an indication something is happening. In these cases luckily it did happen.

NGUYEN: When we talk about the tips, it seems in a lot of cases kids were tipped off. Are we seeing nowadays where kids are getting this information and actually acting on this information. They are not being afraid to speak up. They say, this is what I heard, and this could be a problem.

SACCO: This should be credited to the schools. Schools really have to keep an eye on their climates. They have to recognize that when kids fall off the mainstream, that's an indication. They have to make it easy for kids to talk to teachers or to talk to principals. They have to -- it can't be just a punitive. They can't always punish the kids, because if that happens, the kids won't speak up.

NGUYEN: We want them to keep speaking up, and hopefully we won't see any more cases like this. As you say, it does happen. We appreciate your insight on why it's happening. Frank Sacco, a consultant to the FBI on school shootings. We appreciate your time today.