

**ZERO**  
**TOLERANCE**

A **zero-tolerance policy in schools** is a policy of punishing any infraction of a rule, regardless of accidental mistakes, ignorance, or extenuating circumstances. In schools, common zero-tolerance policies concern possession or use of illicit drugs or weapons. Students, and sometimes staff, parents, and other visitors, who possess a banned item for any reason are always (if the policy is followed) to be punished.



These policies are promoted as preventing drug abuse and violence in schools. Critics say zero tolerance in schools have occasionally resulted in punishments which have been criticized as egregiously unfair against students and teachers, especially in schools with poorly written policies. Consequently, these policies are sometimes derided as **zero-intelligence policies**. **Outside** school, zero tolerance may be used in general or with reference to a particular category of transgressions, e.g. a zero-tolerance policy against alcohol use.

Now more than ever, parents are growing more concerned about activities in schools that may be harmful to children. In response to the growing concerns of parents, many schools have adopted zero-tolerance policies, which aim to discourage students from engaging in destructive behavior. Several schools have also hired police officers to patrol the hallways of schools to provide extra safety to students. Zero tolerance aims to eliminate alcohol, drugs, violence and academic dishonesty in schools through tough measures that have at times been controversial



**P O L I C I E S**

## Overview of Zero Tolerance

Schools that have adopted zero-tolerance policies typically punish students who have become entangled in alcohol, drugs, violence or academic dishonesty quite harshly. Many proponents of zero-tolerance policies claim that this will help discourage bad behavior in schools and will provide a better learning environment for students who are not troublemakers. Opponents of zero tolerance suggest that these policies will further alienate troubled students from learning and thus make it more likely that these students will become more dangerous and violent.



## Impact on Teachers

Many critics suggest that zero-tolerance policies in schools have an adverse impact on teachers, who do not have much liberty to correct and guide a student who has made a mistake. Evidence suggests that many zero-tolerance schools administer a high number of suspensions and expulsions. These reactions can have a possibly detrimental effect on the expelled or suspended students' academic careers. Many teachers suggest using violence prevention programs to train students about knowing how to manage peer pressure and other difficult situations when they arise.



## Bullying in Schools:

Bullying has become a growing problem in many schools across the nation. Many students must also face harassment and bullying from students via social networking sites and cell phone text messages. Students facing bullying from their peers need to alert their teachers to the harassment. Under many zero-tolerance policies at schools, the offenders would be suspended or expelled for harassment of another student. This can have a great impact on reducing the numbers of incidents involving bullying in school.



### Alternative Solutions:

Early intervention and social skills training programs have been touted as viable options to zero-tolerance policies. By teaching students critical social interaction skills, they can be better prepared to face challenges that arise in their daily lives at school. Students can learn how to diffuse conflict, and they can build confidence, to let them know that they do not have to fold to peer pressure and put themselves and others at risk. Teaching students with role playing, giving them specific scenarios to discuss, is an excellent way for students to learn the ropes.



## **Punish, don't destroy**

"Zero tolerance and expulsion don't have to go hand in hand," says Ronald Stephens, executive director of the National School Safety Center in Westlake, Calif. "Zero tolerance simply means all misbehavior will have some sanction. It doesn't mean you bring the maximum punishment for every transgression."

"I'm terribly embarrassed when I read about some of these cases," says Sandra Feldman, president of the American Federation of Teachers, the nation's second largest teachers union, which has pushed hard for zero-tolerance policies. "These are examples of adults not exercising proper responsibility. I'm always in favor of just plain common sense."





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