



# School Safety Newsletter

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## A Parent's Guide to the Creepy Clown Scare

CNN, October 6, 2016

<http://www.cnn.com/2016/10/06/health/clown-scare-parents-guide-trnd/>

The clowns are here, and they won't go away. What started as a few amusing headlines in August has now ballooned into a full-blown clown epidemic, and no one would blame you if you were a bit curious and perhaps even a little concerned.

After all, while there's been plenty of social media foolishness and hoaxes across the country, there have also been a few more sinister incidents, all of them seemingly feeding off each other.

When should you worry, and when should you dismiss it as a harmless trend? Here's the long and short of the "threat," and what school officials and law enforcement are doing to keep everyone safe and sane.

### **Have people actually gotten hurt?**

**There have been some serious incidents, but most threats and rumors have remained unsubstantiated.**

Actually, yes. As much as this clown craze has been rife with hoaxes and false alarms, there have also been some legitimate incidents where costumed people have been caught trying to intimidate or attack others.

On October 5, 2016, a teenager said a person in a clown suit chased him out of a New York subway station while brandishing a knife. On Thursday, officials in Tulsa, Oklahoma, said a man was attacked by a clown while walking his dog. The assailant reportedly wrestled him to the ground, and hit him enough to cause scrapes and bruising.

Other incidents from around the country range from a robbery allegedly committed by someone in a clown mask to generic social media threats of clowns coming to attack schools or public places.

On October 4, 2016, Texas State University in San Marcos announced a person dressed in a clown outfit assaulted someone outside of a university housing complex.

A university statement reminded students to be "aware of [their] surroundings" and to call the University Police Department to report any suspicious activity.

To be clear, while some of these occurrences have been violent and dangerous, most clown reports we've seen have merely involved mischief and noncredible social media threats.

### **What are schools doing?**

**Schools are communicating with parents, and issuing rules and disciplinary actions if necessary.**

Obviously, schools have to take threats seriously, even if it turns out it's just some kids having a laugh at everyone's expense. Schools around the country have been responding to threats by notifying parents, students and local law enforcement.

A threat made by a clown-themed Facebook page toward Westwood High School in Houston prompted a letter from the principal.

"We immediately notified (Houston Independent School District) Police, and officers determined the threat was not credible," the letter read. "However, HISD Police have assigned extra officers to patrol our campus as a precautionary measure."

*Protecting our  
future through  
information  
sharing*

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## **A Parent's Guide to the Creepy Clown Scare (Continued)**

Some areas have taken more intense precautions. New Haven Public Schools in New Haven, Connecticut, banned all clown costumes on school grounds due to the uptick in social media threats.

"At this time there is no indication this incident poses any real or substantial threat to New Haven Public Schools or Students," a memo from the school system reads. "Until additional information is available, New Haven Public Schools Director of Security Thaddeus Reddish asks that principals and building leaders prohibit clown costumes and any symbols of terror during this Halloween season."

### **What are police doing?**

**Law enforcement officials are investigating alleged crimes, but are also urging the public to stay calm and not engage in clown mischief.**

Police departments in clown-affected areas have made two things clear: They're vigilant, but not worried, and they really want people to stop pulling stupid clown stunts.

On October 3, 2016, Deputy Commissioner John Miller of the New York Police Department said the NYPD has found clown threats in the city to be harmless.

"We have tried to avoid falling into the trap of putting extra police protection or presence in places where we've had these," he said. "Our main message is don't believe the hype and don't be afraid of the clowns."

Police departments from North Carolina to Michigan have issued warnings to pranksters, discouraging them from "copycat" clown crimes. The Roselle Park Police Department in New Jersey has asked parents to avoid letting their teenagers dress up as clowns for Halloween -- not only for the well-being of others, but also for their own well-being.

"Residents may be extra sensitive to 'evil or creepy' clown attacks leading up to Halloween," their Facebook post read. "Police are warning would-be clown pranksters and other characters: Carrying anything that is perceived to be a weapon in public, into businesses or in and around schools exposes you to criminal charges and/or potential danger if it is confused for a real weapon."

In other words, while actual clown threats appear to be few and far between, the panic they cause and the copycat crimes they inspire could pose a real problem.

### **How should I handle my kids?**

**Reassure them that they're safe, and be vigilant but critical of the hype.**

Dr. David Andereg, a psychologist and author of "Worried All the Time: Overparenting in an Age of Anxiety and How to Stop It," says parents should be measured in their approach and really consider how much of this clown fad is real, and how much of it is unnecessary hype.

"It's so hard to figure out how much of this is people passing stuff around on Facebook, or how much of it is copycat stuff," he says. "Parents should continue to do what parents do, which is be vigilant, but not hypervigilant. Let kids go out and about. There's no need to be overly suspicious, but certainly continue to teach kids not to accept things from strangers or be alone with strangers."

If your child is scared, Andereg suggests avoiding any type of popular media that has to do with clowns. (Sorry, kids. No Halloween showings of "It.") He also says a simple reassurance that you will keep them safe can go a long way.

On the flip side, Andereg also says parents shouldn't be worried about kids being drawn to any creepy clown figures. "Children know a lot about context," he says. "And if a child sees a clown walking down a street or in a public park or something, they're not going to be excited like they would be if they were at a circus or a celebration. They're going to think, like everyone else, 'What the heck is that clown doing here?'"

Finally, if you're worried about your kids and clowns, consider this important question: If someone really wanted to hurt your child, or even commit a serious crime, would they do it wearing a highly visible, very obvious clown suit?

Andereg says no. "If someone really wanted to hurt children, dressing up like a clown would not be the way to do it, because they're calling attention to themselves," he says. "People who want to hurt children are insidious. A real child abuser wouldn't wear a clown suit. A college kid who just wants to scare people would."

"Someone who's actually out to hurt children, they're much more interested in blending in, not standing out."

## **Monthly Webinars!**

First Wednesday of Every Month at 10 am (Except January, July, and August).

### **Next Webinar**

**Wednesday**

**November 2, 2016**

Each webinar has a round table discussion at the end. Questions are always welcome!

To participate, you must be a vetted member. For more information please email [schoolsafety@isp.state.il.us](mailto:schoolsafety@isp.state.il.us)

## **Counselor Talks Student Down From School Shooting**

News Channel 5, September 29, 2016

<http://www.newschannel5.com/news/local-news/teacher-talks-student-down-from-school-shooting>

PLEASANT VIEW, Tenn. - A Cheatham County Counselor talked a student out of opening fire inside a school. Investigators said she prevented him using a fully loaded semi-automatic handgun Wednesday.

The Cheatham County Sheriff's said a 14-year-old boy showed up at Sycamore Middle School in Pleasant View with the intent to kill some teachers and a police officer - but not any students.

He reportedly asked to speak with Molly Hudgens, a counselor at the school. Investigators said she sensed something was wrong and asked if he had a gun. The student claimed he was having various problems.

In a taped statement Hudgens said, "my previous training and experience granted me the opportunity to help a student in need while protecting our school family as well."

Hudgens has worked at Sycamore Middle School for nearly 19-years.

"I want to assure our school community that no specific teachers or were named as targets," Hudgens said.

The teen reportedly said Huges would be the only person to talk him out of opening fire. Investigators say she talked with him for at least 45 minutes.

During that time, Huges attempted to reach the Student Resource Officer.

"There was problems early on technically with getting communication out with what was going on," Cheatham County Sheriff Mike Breedlove said. "But at the same time she was dealing with this young man trying to defuse the situation."

By the time officers arrived, Huges had convinced the student to hand over the gun. "She is a hero in our community no doubt about that," Sheriff Breedlove said.

Parents received recorded calls Monday afternoon about the incident. But they didn't learn details until Thursday. Still, Sycamore Middle School Parent Jason Young said he is understood why the district waited to disclose Hudges's heroic actions.

"Thank you is all I got," Young said. "I wish there was so much more that we could say to express the true graduate for her act yesterday."

The teen was charged with carrying and possession of a weapon on school property and communicating a threat concerning a school employee.

He was being held at the Williamson County Juvenile Detention Center. Chatham County School Board policy means he will be expelled.

His name was not released.

## **Schools Warn of 'Virtual Kidnapping' Scam Targeting Parents**

PBS, October 8, 2016

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/virtual-kidnapping-scam-parents/>

Schools across the U.S. are warning about a scam to convince parents that their children have been kidnapped — even though they haven't — and to collect ransom money.

Cases of "virtual kidnapping" have been reported over the past two months in Virginia, California, Texas, Arizona and other states. Authorities say the scam often targets the parents of college students, tricking some into paying thousands of dollars and appears to be on the rise nationally.

In many cases, parents receive a call from a stranger who claims to have kidnapped their child, and can often provide the child's name or other details. Some parents have reported hearing screams or a muffled cry in the background. Then the caller orders parents to wire money in exchange for their child's release.

"They really prey on people's fears, and in this case it's a very intense fear, thinking that your child's been kidnapped," said Jay Gruber, police chief at Georgetown University, where a parent reported the scam on Thursday. In that case, the parent used social media to contact the child, and didn't pay the ransom.

Usually, the ransom demand is between \$600 and \$1,900, according to the FBI's New York field office, which issued a warning about the scam in January 2015. FBI officials said they weren't available to comment on Friday. Gruber said the scheme emerged in the U.S. more than a year ago but has become more common recently.

## Schools Warn of ‘Virtual Kidnapping’ Scam Targeting Parents (Continued)

Mia Ray Langheim

School Intelligence  
Officer



Thirkel Freeman was driving with his wife, Coretta, last week when a man called Coretta’s cell phone and said he had kidnapped their daughter, Kiauna, a senior at the University of Maryland. The caller even put a woman on the phone who claimed to be Kiauna and had a similar voice, pleading them to pay the ransom. The man threatened to kill Kiauna if they didn’t.

“He says, ‘If you play games with me, it’s over,’” said Thirkel, of White Plains, Maryland. “At that point, we were at the peak of traumatization.” Coretta called the police, who arrived and guided the couple through the call. But the Freemans ultimately wired \$1,300 to the caller before finding out Kiauna was safe on campus.

Several colleges have issued alerts about the scam, including Georgetown, Arizona State University, George Mason University and the University of Texas at Arlington.

The calls often come from outside area codes, sometimes from Puerto Rico, according to the FBI. If someone calls demanding a ransom, authorities say parents should try to text their child or reach them through social media to confirm their child’s safety. Or they can ask the alleged kidnapper to have their child call back from his or her own phone. “Once you find out that your child is fine, just disengage with them,” Gruber said. “Or, if your child is with you, tell them to go to hell and hang up on them.”

## New Research: Multi-Victim School Shootings in the United States: A Fifty-Year Review by Peter Langman, Ph.D.

September 1, 2016

Abstract: This study examined 64 school shooters who committed multi-victim attacks in the United States during the years 1966 through 2015. Results include demographic analysis of age, venues of attack, racial/ethnic identity, magnitude of attacks, and frequency of perpetrator suicide. Data is provided for the sample as a whole, as well as for different time periods to highlight trends over time. Notable results include numerous changes in post-Columbine attacks, including greater age range of perpetrators, more perpetrators who are not white males, increased fatalities, and increased suicide rates. The article is forthcoming in the *Journal of Campus Behavioral Intervention* (J-BIT) 4 (2016). It is reprinted here with permission of the National Behavioral Intervention Team Association (NaBITA).

To view the full PDF research article, visit: [https://schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/fifty\\_year\\_review\\_1.0.pdf](https://schoolshooters.info/sites/default/files/fifty_year_review_1.0.pdf)

## State Regulator Warns Halloween Colored Contacts Could Permanently Damage Your Eyes

Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation, October 11, 2016

**CHICAGO** — With the Halloween season upon us, the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation (IDFPR) is reminding the public that purchasing colored contact lenses from anyone other than a licensed eye care professional or pharmacist is dangerous. In recent years, illegally-purchased colored contacts have flooded the retail market during Halloween and are most often found at malls, beauty supply stores and via online websites. These lenses are often made overseas in non-FDA approved facilities with tinting materials that may be toxic to the eye. Without a proper examination and fitting, colored contacts can cause damage to the eye, including blindness.

To view the whole press release, visit: <http://www.idfpr.com/news/2016/10122016HalloweenColoredContactsCouldDamageEyes.asp>

## National Schools Safety Week, October 16—22, 2016

The National School Safety Center, state governors and state school superintendents sponsor America's Safe Schools Week, October 16-22, 2016. This observance is also actively supported by local, state and national public officials and professional organizations.

Significant progress is being made to ensure that all of our nation's schools are safe, secure and productive. At the forefront of this movement are hundreds of exemplary school, district, state and national programs. To recognize these successes and encourage others, October 16-22, 2016, has been proclaimed America's Safe Schools Week.

To view a list of ideas to address school safety, visit: <http://www.schoolsafety.us/safe-schools-week>

### School Safety Newsletter

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