



Entertainment Industries Council
The **ART** of Making a Difference

Gun Violence Depiction Suggestions

The Mission

Content creators wield the power to **steer our culture to a “FEAR-LESS” society, where communities can fear less that they will become victims of someone else’s trauma.**

We hear the term ‘active shooter’ too often in schools and public venues. The Fear-Less campaign addresses the intersection of mass murders, mental health of victims and responders rather than shooters, suicide risk, **trauma**, and firearms through a series of webinars with experts in these diverse fields.

EIC offers the opportunity to share our conversations that focused on proper terminology, media engagement, and how the entertainment industry can help reduce the appeal of certain weapons through prop substitution and creative storytelling. We know from history with seat belts and smoking that they do contribute to positive culture change.

The impact of gun violence does not stop with the victims as there are spill over ripple effects that traumatize entire communities. The Fear-Less campaign strives to promote story-telling that helps to reduce firearm-related violence, and we recognize the important role schools, workplaces, first responders, health care providers including emergency physicians, trauma surgeons and nurses, law enforcement, the media and entertainment industry and a host of other entities serve to facilitate this important goal.

The Challenge

Talking [about the intersection of mental health, suicide risk, and firearms](#) is complex, challenging, and at times difficult. While these three distinct concepts at times carry weight, and meaning for different audiences, it is worth a much-needed conversation among cross functional/multidisciplinary groups.

In the case of mass shootings, this statement underscores the critical importance of recognizing that the impact on mental health, suicide risk, and firearms extends far beyond the shooter, encompassing victims, their families, and first

responders, all of whom experience significant and lasting effects in the wake of such incidents.

Creating a series of webinars with experts in each of these areas engaged in military, first responders, parents, media, firearm owners, and medical communities to start the conversation, we faced challenges. How do we frame the conversation? How do we strategically but carefully discuss the following:

- The frequency, horror, shock of these events.
- The common denominators: motive (revenge), method (such as assault style rapid fire firearms), the AR-15 rifle, death of the shooter either by suicide or law enforcement.
- The fear/post-traumatic stress and anxiety left for survivors and witnesses.
- The challenge (to date, with little success) in prevention of future killings.
- The blame, and pain following these horrible events – on families, security teams, first responders, health care providers, school personnel.
- How do we and should we portray/frame violence committed with firearms?

Through these webinars and the rich conversations that took place we identified various suggestions to create change when it comes to the intersection of mental health, suicide risk, and firearms.

Depiction Suggestions

Words Matter

Words matter when speaking about firearms. Language has the power to shape perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes. Words can affect safety, legal and policy outcomes, public perception, education, and respectful communication on this important and often contentious topic.

When discussing firearms, using precise and clear terminology is important for several reasons:

- **Safety & Education:** Accurate language helps prevent misunderstandings and miscommunication, reducing the risk of misrepresentation and accidents or mishandling of firearms.
- **Legal and Policy Implications:** The terminology used in laws and regulations can have significant legal and policy implications. The way a law is worded can impact who can own firearms, how they can be used, and under what circumstances.
- **Respect:** Using respectful and accurate language when discussing firearms can help promote a constructive and respectful dialogue among people with different perspectives on the subject.

Language suggestions:

- Use terms like “rifles” instead of words like “weapons of war” or “assault weapons” to promote accurate conversations about firearms. Refrain from using words like “assault weapon” or “AR-15 assault weapon” in conversations about firearms and instead use the accurate description - term/name - of the object.
- Using terms that avoid common political jargon will allow conversation and discussion to remain positive and less politically charged.

How We Depict Firearms Matters

Visual representations can shape perception and influence attitudes towards firearms. Here are a few reasons why the way we depict firearms is important:

- **Safety and Education:** Accurate depictions of guns can contribute to promoting safety measures and responsible firearm ownership. Properly illustrating safe firearm handling, safe storage practices, and responsible use can enhance public understanding and reduce accidents.
- **Public Perception:** The portrayal of guns in media and popular culture can influence how people perceive them. Misrepresentations and glamorization of guns can potentially normalize or romanticize violence, while making them the hero instead of the deserving characters. This redirection leading to misguided ideas about the role and impact of firearms and violence in society.
- **Stigmatization or Normalization:** Depending on how guns are depicted, they can either reinforce stigmas associated with firearms or normalize their presence.
- **Cultural Attitudes:** Guns can have different cultural meanings and significance across societies, including differing cultures within specific societies.

Depiction Suggestion:

- Consider substituting props for firearms whenever possible. Minimally, substitute AR-15 rifles, rapid fire, or semi-automatic firearms.
- Stress the importance of safe gun ownership/storage on screen.
- Include more character development before showing violent firearm use.
- Journalists report stories, rather than advocate
- Listen, don't polarize
- Focus on a public safety issue rather than a firearms issue
- Use the term rifles rather than weapons
- Avoid desensitizing the public
- Don't villainize others if they are not on your side, but bring them into the discussions - don't take away voices but add to the conversation.
- Address solutions, more than obstacles
- Consider characters as heroes rather than firearms.
- Center the focus on characters rather than props
- Consider reducing the amount of vengeance in films.
- Listen to all perspectives with engagement - authentic stories
- Focus on the victims and the community who are impact too, not just the shooter
- Examine how a film depicting violence, including the violent use of a firearm, may impact children and take action to reduce this type of storyline.
- Examine if a firearm is truly necessary to convey the storyline.
- Avoid the narrative that violence is the way to answer problems and explore alternative ways to tell stories.
- Consider the range of opportunities to depict successful outcomes, where support and encouragement represent a life saved.
- Consider introducing gun safety technologies, including smart guys (ie Sky Fall) that avert deaths and injuries. Increasingly, the media has made progress with cars (people wearing seatbelts) and with tobacco (fewer scenes with cigarettes).

Safety in Schools

Depiction Suggestion:

- Consider more storytelling about schools that have a robust multidisciplinary threat assessment team and threat assessment process.
- Consider adding themes showing Active Shooter Drill Day in schools.
- Adults in the school environment - don't mix or integrate the two; define the difference:
 - The school staff provides discipline
 - Law enforcement provide safety
- Storytelling is a powerful tool for raising awareness about school safety issues. It can capture people's attention and help them understand the importance of creating a safe learning environment for students. It can also empower other schools to create safety plans.
- Consider placing an emphasis on student belongingness and connectedness. Consider themes of isolation, bullying, abusive behavior/language
- Consider showing depictions empowering students
- Consider scripting stories with themes on the identification of students in need and getting them help, whether for mental health, bullying etc.
- This creates Social-emotional well-being: When students feel connected to their peers and have a sense of belonging in their school, it can have a positive impact on their overall well-being. Students who feel supported and connected are more likely to have positive self-esteem, lower levels of stress, and better mental health outcomes.

Depiction Suggestion:

- Through depictions in storytelling, try to demonstrate how to identify signs and symptoms of students/individuals who may be struggling.
- Media has a significant influence on society, shaping opinions, attitudes, and behaviors. Therefore, media outlets have the opportunity to educate the public on how to identify signs and symptoms of students or individuals who may be struggling. Visualize this information, the media can empower individuals to recognize when someone is in distress and take appropriate action to help them and stress the importance of empathy and destigmatizing mental health issues.
- Show how to make action plans in school for students who are showing signs of distress.
- Media can play a crucial role in raising awareness, and providing valuable information on how to normalize and reduce stigma by openly discussing student distress and how educators are helping students in distress through the use of action plans tailored for the student. Media portrayals have a wide reach, a valuable partner in safe messaging depictions.

Supportive Communities

When individuals are a part of a supportive community, they are more likely to seek help. Community members consist of victims and families, but it also includes first responders and journalists who are witnessing the immediate impact of mass shootings.

When peers come together to offer support and understanding, it can help break down the barriers and stereotypes associated with mental health issues. This can lead to greater acceptance and empathy towards those experiencing a crisis. Supportive communities can provide individuals with information and resources to help navigate their mental health crisis. This includes access to mental health professionals, helplines, support groups, and other services that can assist in managing and overcoming the crisis. Knowing that there are resources available and a community willing to help can make a significant difference in an individual's journey to recovery.

Depiction Suggestions:

- Consider showing more stories about people who are experiencing a mental health crisis and how others care for them.
- Listen, don't polarize. Some of these people have access to firearms and other lethal means.
- Depict actions where others are taking the proper action to separate people having a mental health crisis from having direct access to their firearm.
- Consider focusing stories on the mental health of first responders and journalists who are directly involved in the aftermath of mass shootings.

Resources

Research on what the media portrays about firearms may be important for understanding the impact of media representations on public opinion and behavior. Research helps us understand how firearms are depicted in various forms of media such as news articles, movies, television, and video games. It enables us to analyze the narratives, images, and messaging surrounding firearms in the media and assess their accuracy, fairness, and potential impact on public perception.

Despite potential category overlap, our diligent efforts were directed towards identifying the predominant category depicted in the research below, ensuring the accuracy and relevance of our findings.

Partner with Academic Institutions to accurately depict the damage that a bullet does to a human body.

Visit the [Fear-Less](#) for current resources and to hear our expert panelists discuss gun violence and depiction.

- [June 21, 2023](#): Hollywood, Military Professionals, and Medical Community Unites to Discuss Mental Health, Suicide Risk, and Firearms.
- [July 26, 2023](#): The Intersection of Mental Health and Firearms

- [November 8, 2023](#): The Intersection of Journalism and the Gun Violence Crisis

[Suicide and Homicide Firearm Deaths by type of Firearm](#), National Violent Death Reporting System States 2020, NVDRS: National Violent Death Reporting System [Internet]. Atlanta: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2002 [cited 2023 Sept 11].

[Detroit Children's Choir](#): A Media Campaign to Address Gun Violence in Schools with the Power of Music
Dateline: West Orange, NJ. We are launching an innovative new video and web-based project that will address the concerns of students around the issues of gun violence in their schools and communities. Since 2020, gun violence has surpassed all other causes of child mortality, including cancer, auto accidents and poisoning. "The airwaves and internet are filled with adult voices weighing in on all sides of this issue," Michael confirmed, "But our project is different in two important ways. First, are capturing the diverse voices of America's young people via selfies that they themselves will directly upload to us. And second, we have taken their concerns and literally set them to music in collaboration with America's Got Talent finalists the Detroit Youth Choir."

[Stand with Parkland](#): *Resource K-12 School Safety & Security Resource Guide*, Stand with Parkland is committed to advocating for practical public safety reforms focused on the safety of our children and staff at school, improved mental health support, and responsible firearms ownership. Teachers, administrators, law enforcement, lawmakers, and concerned citizens all have a role to play to make sure solutions are implemented in our schools.

[The Glowmedia Project](#): Today's teens live in a fast-paced environment with new and different pressures. While parents may not want to think about preparing teens for mental wellness, it needs to be part of every child's education. Since 2016, the glowmedia project has offered free films and resources to help young people develop the emotional agility necessary to thrive.

[New Rules: Hollywood's Culture of Violence | Real Time with Bill Maher \(HBO\)](#): Hollywood is the wokest place on earth in every other area of social responsibility, but when it comes to the unbridled romanticization of gun violence – crickets.

[The Center for Safe and Resilient Schools and Workplaces](#): Launched by leading experts in the field of trauma-informed schools, The Center has pioneered national practices for threat assessment, crisis response, and trauma-responsive strategies. The Center provides multi-tier prevention, response, and recovery trainings and consultations, with a proven track record of strengthening and restoring communities. Our work involves close collaborations with schools to develop and deliver customizable interventions. Through these partnerships, we continually adapt and expand our offerings to meet current needs.

[PTA - Calling for Action on Gun Violence Prevention](#): PTA has been the conscience of this country on issues affecting children and youth for over 125 years, and we're never going to stop advocating for every child with one united voice. Our association has challenged Congress over and over again to address this issue. We urge you to join us in demanding change—and to take care of yourself and your family, too.



Additional resources: www.eiconline.org/fear-less

