

THE FBI IS YOUR FRIEND, KID

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I'm a novice soccer Mom. Being new to the sidelines, I'm good at yelling, but not so good at the specifics of what to yell. "Sweetheart! Do something!" I called recently to some poor kid. And the rules confound me. The one that gets me the most is the one about lying down when you're been hurt. I don't want injured children putting their heads near cleated shoes. And the site of a child lying motionless brings out the "911" in me.

Still, the rule for spectators is to sit and watch and hope for the best. When an injured child does rise--and so far they all have--the protocol is that everyone applauds. Not loudly. No shouts or hoorays. Just a grateful, "Glad to see you're back in the game", encouraging sort of clap. When the child can actually smile or wave, the applause grows into a rolling thunder of parental relief.

In early September the FBI released a school threat assessment guide. Called "The School Shooter," it spells out a list of personality traits drawn from descriptions of children with guns in 18 school incidents. It also spells out traits describing the shooter's families, schools, and social groups.

A lot of dismay met the announcement of the guidelines. I suppose schools had been hoping for a simple "school shooter profile" that would help them weed out the revenge-motivated, oddly-behaving loners with access to guns that we've heard so much

about. What they got instead was a thick document that says, in essence, "Families, schools, and social groups are all part of the problem. All must be part of the solution."

I live in Putney, Vermont, population around 2,000. We all know each other and spend way too much time waving to each other happily throughout the day. Call me xenophobic, but I like to think that reactions nationwide are one thing--but that we in Putney can do better than be disappointed with the new FBI guidelines. Indeed, I like to think that our generosity towards injured soccer players hints at a willingness to embrace children so injured by life that they make threats at school.

You see, the FBI guide suggests that any student making threats be evaluated--and helped--by a team that includes law enforcement and school counselors. In Putney, if we were to follow the guidelines, any kid threatening violence would land under the watchful gaze of our school counselor, Kathy Bartlett, and our town police officer, Eddie Wilson. Frankly, I couldn't imagine a more remedial environment for a child in distress.

Granted, sometimes I do feel safer imagining a "zero tolerance" policy that would have our school expel students at the very first sign of trouble. Even in Putney, there are children about whom many of us think twice. Wouldn't our town school be safer without them. No, says the FBI. According to the new guidelines, the danger of zero tolerance policies is that they further infuriate angry children and then put them afloat in the community.

So think about it in terms of soccer: In any community, big or small, a child who is so thoroughly threatened by life as to threaten the life of another has got to *lie down on the field* until he or she can be *helped* to stand. I like to imagine our town's one school counselor and one cop helping a child to his or her feet--and applauding the moment the child begins to walk. ("Glad to see you're back in the game.") The FBI has recommended small acts of kindness--helping and applauding a child in need of help and applause. If the FBI is right on this one, the discreet and dignified flutter of compassionate hands may regularly be transformed-into the rolling thunder of everyone's relief.

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