
School Shooters — the Myth of the Stable Home

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One misconception regarding school shooters is that they typically come from stable, intact, middle- to upper-middle-class families — e.g., from “good homes.” Though this is true of some perpetrators, it is not true of many of them. This document presents information on the families of some school shooters in the United States. This is far from being a complete list, including only those for whom there is information regarding their childhoods, though even this is sometimes minimal. They are listed in chronological order by attack date.

The concept of “stable, intact, middle-class families” is difficult to define. For my purposes, “stable” and “intact” refer to how functional the families were, regardless of whether or not the parents’ marriage (if they had one) was legally intact. For example, Evan Ramsey’s father spent ten years in prison. During this time Ramsey’s mother became alcoholic and lived with a series of violent men. Even if the marriage were still legally intact during the father’s imprisonment (which it appears to have been), Ramsey did not grow up in an intact or a stable family.

Indicators of broken homes, instability, or dysfunction include parental absence, separation, divorce, infidelity, parental alcoholism or drug addiction, criminal behavior, domestic violence, and child abuse. Economic status is often hard to determine, but some details are provided.

In some cases, all that is known is that the parents divorced (or separated). Despite the lack of details, it should be kept in mind that divorce or separation are often preceded by years of discord and may be the result of infidelity, domestic violence, or addiction. In addition, the process of divorcing when children are involved can be highly charged and tumultuous for all parties.

Out of this sample of fifty-six school shooters, only ten (18%) grew up in a stable home with both biological parents. In other words, eighty-two percent of the sample

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either grew up in dysfunctional families or without their parents together (for at least part of their lives).

Though the focus here is on perpetrators in the United States, following this listing are shooters from other countries who came from broken homes or unstable families.¹

1 · U.S. SCHOOL SHOOTERS

Charles Whitman

Father beat his wife
Father beat his children
Mother left father when Whitman was adult

Edward Allaway

Father was alcoholic factory worker

Brenda Spencer

Parents divorced
Home dirty, furniture torn, trash lying around

Van Hull

Broken home, lived with grandmother until age nine

Kristofer Hans

Broken home; parents lived in different states
Father beat him with belt
Lived in fear of having to live with his father again

Floyd Warmesley III

Apparent broken home; lived with father

Laurie Dann

[Marriage intact; no known dysfunction]

James Wilson

Four generations of mental illness, violence, and drug abuse

¹ [This document includes incidents through 2015; we hope in a future revision to extend the coverage up to the present. — Ed., 2026]

Father beat him with belt, hit him in head with a can, hit him with shoes
Father threatened to shoot him
Mother reportedly beat him
Grandparents reportedly beat him
When he had psychological problems, family didn't take him to professionals, but gave
him relatives' medications (pain killers, sedatives, anti-psychotics, anti-depressants)

Nicholas Elliot

Broken home; lived with grandmother

Patrick Purdy

Mother married and divorced three times
Parents separated after father threatened to shoot mother
Mother was alcoholic
Mother neglected and abused him
He was removed from home temporarily due to neglect
At thirteen, mother kicked him out; lived on streets of Los Angeles; prostituted to survive
Later on, mother was homeless

Wayne Lo

Father beat him
Father admitted to using riding crop in the beatings
Wayne reportedly hated his parents for how they treated him

Eric Houston

Mother was physically abused by multiple relatives
Aunt molested by Houston's grandfather
Uncle killed three people in a fight
Father was violent alcoholic who cheated on his wife, fought with her, and abandoned
the family
Mother was suicidal
Father re-entered Houston's life, was still alcoholic and used hard drugs

Scott Pennington

Father had severe alcoholism and drug abuse; reportedly suffered mental impairment
from substances
Father beat wife
Father abused Pennington
Very poor: no telephone, toilet, or running water

Toby Sincino

Parents were separated/estranged
Lived with father in trailer

Jamie Rouse

Father was severe alcoholic and drug addict
Father spent night in jail four times
Father was fired from many jobs for drinking
Father's substance abuse nearly bankrupted family
Father beat kids with belt and paddle
Father punched holes in walls
Father blasted six pet cats with shotgun and flung carcasses into tree

Barry Loukaitis

Parents' marriage fell apart
Father had affair
Mother told Loukaitis she planned to tie up husband and his girlfriend and kill herself
in front of them

Frederick Davidson

Grandmother committed to state mental hospital
Father had psychological problems (details unknown)
Parents divorced when Davidson was a child

Jillian Robbins

Parents divorced
Mother married second husband
Mother divorced second husband
Mother married second husband a second time
Mother divorced second husband a second time
Father remarried

Evan Ramsey

Father in prison for ten years for armed rampage and taking hostages
Older brother arrested for armed robbery, theft, firearms charges, and assault
Mother severe alcoholic
Mother had series of violent boyfriends
Mother had boyfriend with long list of arrests, including firearms and sexual assault
Mother's boyfriend was registered sex offender
Mother arrested for drunk driving and public drunkenness

Ramsey placed in ten foster homes over two years
Abused and molested in foster home
Very poor: social worker found family in unheated apartment with outside temperature
of twenty-two degrees below zero

Luke Woodham

Parents divorced
Woodham devastated by father's departure from his life
Woodham claimed father emotionally abused him and physically abused his mother,
but no details are known

Michael Carneal

[Marriage intact; no known dysfunction]

Andrew Golden

[Marriage intact; no known dysfunction]

Mitchell Johnson

Parents had stormy marriage that ended in divorce
Father smoked marijuana
Father fired for stealing from company
Father had explosive temper, punched holes in walls
Father beat Mitchell: punched him in the face, threw him against walls
Mother remarried; moved far away from ex-husband
Johnson visited father in summers; hated and feared him

Andrew Worst

[Marriage intact; no known dysfunction]

Kip Kinkel

[Marriage intact; no known dysfunction]

Eric Harris

[Marriage intact; no known dysfunction]

Dylan Klebold

[Marriage intact; no known dysfunction]

T.J. Solomon

Parents divorced
Contact with father ceased at age four
Reported loss of father as worst thing that ever happened to him
Mother said father abandoned her
Father said mother left him for his best friend
Father institutionalized for suicide risk

Seth Trickey

[Marriage intact; no known dysfunction]

Nathaniel Brazill

Parents never married
Mother had multiple abusive relationships with men
Stepfather beat mother, threatened her with a knife; she got PFA against him
Stepfather assaulted Brazill
After four years of abuse, mother got divorce
Mother married again
Seventeen domestic incident reports in six years before Brazill's shooting
Grandfather and uncle were alcoholic
Mother got drunk to the point of vomiting

Andy Williams

Parents divorced, lived in different parts of the country

Jason Hoffman

Parents never married
Father was alcoholic, charged with public drunkenness and malicious mischief
Father arrested for abusing Hoffman as toddler
Father assaulted mother

Robert Flores

Flores seemed to indicate childhood abuse; he wrote that his father wasn't "especially" physically and emotionally abusive, which seems to imply that he was to some extent
Flores wrote he had "marginal" parents at best
Lower socioeconomic status

James Sheets

Father absent throughout his life

John McLaughlin

Parents' marriage rocky; separated for six months
McLaughlin lived in fear of recurring and/or permanent separation

Jeffrey Weise

Parents never married
Father drank
Father killed himself in armed standoff with police
Mother was alcoholic and physically abusive
Mother jailed for driving while intoxicated
Mother jailed for assault
Mother suffered brain damage in car accident
After mother's accident, stepfather took his two children and left Weise
Lived variously with mother, father, relatives, and foster families

Kenneth Bartley

Parents divorced
Mother reportedly broke off contact
Father struggled with alcoholism

Alvaro Castillo

Mother and seven of nine siblings suffered from "severe mental illness"
Father beat mother in front of the children
Father did not believe in physicians or medicine, thought cold water cured everything;
when sick, the children had to take cold showers
At age five, father told him childhood was over and he could no longer have friends
Mother wanted to leave, but father threatened to kill her if she did

Duane Morrison

While married, mother apparently had affair that produced him
Parents separated
Father abused him to the point of terror, beating him with fists and belt buckles
Father may have molested him (see "Duane Morrison: A Profile" at *School Shooters.info*)
Siblings reported that childhood was "hellacious"
Mother died when Duane was fifteen
He moved in with aunt; she died a few years later

Eric Hainstock

Household was filthy
Mother may have been alcoholic

Father was unemployed
Father hit him with belt and piece of wood
Father charged with felony child abuse (charges later dropped)
Woman who dated father had two PFAs against him
Both parents reportedly “beat him, kicked him, slapped him, and threw things at him”
Father made him hold hot sauce and hot peppers in his mouth
Father made him run as punishment for so long that he wet his pants
Father worked him like a “slave” and used strange punishments
Adoptive mother physically abused him
Stepfather physically abused him
Stepbrother sexually abused him
Showed up at school with split lip, another time with no shirt, and another time “filthy and smelling”
Mother gave up parental rights when Eric was eight and abandoned him

Seung Hui Cho

[Marriage intact; no known dysfunction]

Asa Coon

Parents divorced (or never married); father not involved
Mother subject of neglect case with court
House and yard filthy
Often went to school dirty, unkempt, and poorly clothed
Social services investigated home due to scratches, burns, and flea bites
Older brothers had many charges: intimidation, burglary, assault, sale of counterfeit drugs, firearms violations, and more
In less than two years, police made five visits to the home due to domestic violence, assault, property crime, and a hit-and-run

Steven Kazmierczak

Parents divorced

Amy Bishop

[Marriage intact; no known dysfunction]

Bruco Eastwood

Parents divorced

Robert Butler, Jr.

Parents never married; lived together on and off for four years, and then separated permanently

T.J. Lane

Parents never married
Mother and father both charged with domestic violence
Mother reportedly had drinking problem
Mother reportedly punched and bit father
Mother jailed for violent behavior
Father arrested for fighting with police officer who intervened in domestic dispute
Father imprisoned for beating and kidnapping a woman
Father held woman's head under running water and bashed it into wall, leaving a dent
Father charged with threatening to kill a woman
Father imprisoned for attacking a woman for nine hours in front of three young children
Father charged with attempted murder and felonious assault
Lane lived variously with parents and both sets of grandparents

Adam Lanza

Parents divorced
Estranged from father and brother

John Zawahri

Father beat mother
Father threatened to kill mother and take the children
Mother left father
Mother had restraining order against father
Father stalked mother, showing up at her apartment and workplace

Jose Reyes

Father violent toward mother
Reyes witnessed domestic violence
Father had affair
Mother discovered affair and separated
Father moved in with other woman, broke off contact with children
Mother wanted a divorce, but feared for her life
Parents eventually reconciled
Father hit him, once so badly that he was arrested and charged with child abuse

Karl Pierson

Parents divorced

Elliot Rodger

Parents divorced

Aaron Ybarra

Father arrested five times for drunk driving

Father incarcerated after third DUI

Father convicted of failing to obey an officer, driving with a suspended license, and violating ignition interlock on vehicle

Father tried to kill himself: drank a bottle of whiskey and slit his throat with a knife

Father embezzled \$400,000 from trust fund for relative

Jared Padgett

Parents separated

Jaylen Fryberg

During Jaylen's early years, father had child with another woman (not Jaylen's mother)

Father committed domestic violence against the other woman; she got a PFA

Father violated PFA against the woman when Jaylen was thirteen

Myron May

Broken home

Father was crack addict

Moved in with grandmother at age twelve

Chris Harper-Mercer

Parents struggled financially

Filed for bankruptcy in 1992

Parents divorced

Father filed for bankruptcy in 2002

2 · NON-U.S. SCHOOL SHOOTERS

Marc Lépine

Father led double life: had two children with other woman while married to Marc's mother

Father was bad-tempered and violent

Parents divorced

Thomas Hamilton

Parents divorced

Grandparents adopted Thomas

He was raised to believe his mother was his older sister

Robert Steinhäuser

Parents divorced

Robert lived with his mother

Matti Saari

Parents separated when he was a year old

Parents divorced when he was three

Wellington de Oliveira

Biological mother gave him up for adoption SS.I