

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.

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 56 school shooters, only 10 (18%) grew up in a stable home with both biological parents. In other words, 82% of the sample either grew up in dysfunctional families or without their parents together (for at least part of their lives).

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

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U.S. SCHOOL SHOOTERS

Charles Whitman	Father beat his wife Father beat his children Mother left father when Whitman was adult
Edward Allaway	Father alcoholic factory worker
Brenda Spencer	Parents divorced Home dirty, furniture torn, trash lying around
Van Hull	Broken home, lived with grandmother until age 9
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	[<i>Marriage intact; no known dysfunction</i>]

James Wilson	<p>Four generations of mental illness, violence, and drug abuse 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)</p>
Nicholas Elliot	<p>Broken home; lived with grandmother</p>
Patrick Purdy	<p>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 13, mother kicked him out; lived on streets of Los Angeles; prostituted to survive Later on, mother was homeless</p>
Wayne Lo	<p>Father beat him Father admitted to using riding crop in the beatings Wayne reportedly hated his parents for how they treated him</p>
Eric Houston	<p>Mother 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</p>
Scott Pennington	<p>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</p>
Toby Sincino	<p>Parents separated/estranged Lived with father in trailer</p>
Jamie Rouse	<p>Father was severe alcoholic and drug addict Spent night in jail four times Fired from many jobs for drinking 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</p>
Barry Loukaitis	<p>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</p>
Frederick Davidson	<p>Grandmother committed to state mental hospital Father had psychological problems (details unknown) Parents divorced when Davidson was a child</p>

Jillian Robbins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 (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 22 degrees below zero
Luke Woodham	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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	<i>[Marriage intact; no known dysfunction]</i>
Andrew Golden	<i>[Marriage intact; no known dysfunction]</i>
Mitchell Johnson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 him: 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 Wurst	<i>[Marriage intact; no known dysfunction]</i>
Kip Kinkel	<i>[Marriage intact; no known dysfunction]</i>
Eric Harris	<i>[Marriage intact; no known dysfunction]</i>
Dylan Klebold	<i>[Marriage intact; no known dysfunction]</i>
T.J. Solomon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents divorced Contact with father ceased at age 4 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	<i>[Marriage intact; no known dysfunction]</i>

Nathaniel Brazill	<p>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 17 domestic incident reports in six years before Brazill's shooting Grandfather and uncle were alcoholic Mother got drunk to the point of vomiting</p>
Andy Williams	Parents divorced, lived in different parts of the country
Jason Hoffman	<p>Parents never married Father was alcoholic, charged with public drunkenness and malicious mischief Father arrested for abusing Hoffman as toddler Father assaulted mother</p>
Robert Flores	<p>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</p>
James Sheets	Father absent throughout his life
John McLaughlin	<p>Parents' marriage rocky; separated for six months McLaughlin lived in fear of recurring and/or permanent separation</p>
Jeffrey Weise	<p>Parents never married Father drank Father killed himself in armed standoff with police Mother 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</p>
Kenneth Bartley	<p>Parents divorced Mother reportedly broke off contact Father struggled with alcoholism</p>
Alvaro Castillo	<p>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 5, 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</p>
Duane Morrison	<p>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" on www.schoolshooters.info) Siblings reported that childhood was "hellacious" Mother died when he was 15 He moved in with aunt; she died a few years later</p>

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 he was 8 and abandoned him
Seung Hui Cho	<i>[Marriage intact; no known dysfunction]</i>
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	<i>[Marriage intact; no known dysfunction]</i>
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 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 13
Myron May	Broken home Father: crack addict Moved in with grandmother at age 12
Chris Harper-Mercer	Parents struggled financially Filed for bankruptcy in 1992 Parents divorced Father filed for bankruptcy in 2002

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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