

# COLUMBINE HIGH SCHOOL

**Situation:** Students kill 13 at Columbine High School.

On 20 April 1999, two high school seniors, Eric Harris aged 18 and Dylan Klebold aged 19, went on a shooting spree at Columbine High School in Jefferson County, Colorado. The heavily armed students killed twelve students and one teacher before taking their own lives.



The attacks on Columbine High School, Virginia Tech, and the school in Beslan, Russia, demonstrate that students may face risks in educational settings.

This incident does not meet the traditional definition of a terrorist attack. One perpetrator was on medication to treat a mental disorder, and neither had a clear political objective. However, the attack at Columbine illustrates several important teaching points for recognizing the insider threat and responding to an active shooter situation.

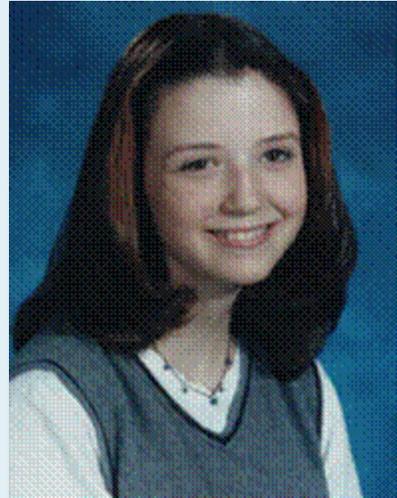


On 20 April 1999, Harris and Klebold arrived at Columbine high school at 11:10 a.m. Upon arriving, they entered the school cafeteria and placed two twenty pound propane bombs concealed in duffel bags under tables. The two returned to their vehicles and waited for the explosions.

The two students had developed an elaborate plan. At approximately 11:14, a bomb placed in an empty field three miles from the school would detonate and draw the attention of response personnel. Three minutes later, when the cafeteria was full of students preparing to eat lunch, the propane bombs would explode. The intent was to kill as many students as possible in the initial explosion; students escaping the explosion would be gunned down by Harris and Klebold who had strategically parked their cars to provide crossfire of the cafeteria exit. Additional bombs were placed in the cars of both students timed to detonate after the arrival of emergency response personnel.

Items such as duffel bags, backpacks, and briefcases may conceal an IED. If you notice an unattended item that might be a threat evacuate the area immediately and notify the proper emergency personnel.

The propane bombs in the cafeteria failed to detonate and Harris and Klebold modified their plan. At their cars, each student armed himself. Harris equipped himself with a 12 gauge Savage-Springfield 67H pump-action shotgun and a Hi-Point 995 Carbine 9 mm semi-automatic rifle with thirteen 10-round magazines. Klebold selected a 9 mm Intratec TEC-9 semi-automatic handgun with one 52-, one 32-, and one 28-round magazine. He also carried a 12 gauge Stevens 311D double barreled sawed-off shotgun. They also carried dozens of pipe bombs and other homemade explosives.



At 11:19 the two approached the west entrance of the school, which was also in sight of one of the cafeteria exits. Harris yelled "Go! Go!" and both drew their weapons. One student was immediately shot and killed as she ate her lunch in the grass by the west entrance to the school; the student eating with her was wounded. Three additional students were shot as they walked up the sidewalk towards the entrance. All three students initially survived, but two were later shot again, killing one of them.

The gunmen then turned on students eating opposite the entrance. Three students managed to flee but three were wounded. One additional student was wounded near the entrance to the school. The gunmen opened fire on students standing near the school soccer field, but all escaped without injury.

The initial moments of an attack are critical. In an active shooter or hostage incident you must decide how to respond. If possible, an attempt to escape may be your best chance for survival. If escape is not possible, you should look for opportunities to hide or shelter in a room or building that can be locked or barricaded. Depending upon the circumstances, active resistance may be appropriate. However, if active resistance is used, you must be prepared to be aggressive and be fully committed to your actions.



As the gunmen moved toward the school entrance they encountered a teacher and student coming out to check on the commotion. Harris and Klebold shot at them through the glass doors and both were injured by flying glass and debris. The teacher fled to the school library and instructed students to take cover under desks before making a call to 911. The student, caught between two sets of doors leading into the building was saved by an exchange of gunfire with an arriving police officer that momentarily distracted Harris and Klebold and gave him time to flee.

Harris and Klebold entered the school and proceeded down the hallway. As they went, they fired at anyone they saw and occasionally stopped to light and throw pipe bombs. The two gunmen encountered one teacher on his way to the library to help evacuate students. He was quickly shot. The teacher managed to make his way to a science room where a number of students were hiding. Two students attempted to provide first aid, but the teacher later died.

Remember that if you are in an active shooter situation there are actions you can take to improve your chances of survival. Most importantly, try to find cover behind something solid. If gunfire is exchanged, crouch to the floor. If grenades or explosives are used, lay flat on the floor with your feet toward the direction of the grenade.

At 11:29: Harris and Klebold entered the library, the scene of the most carnage. In the library, 56 students, two teachers, and two staff members had hidden under desks and tables. Entering the library, Harris yelled "Everyone with white hats, stand up! This is for all the shit you've given us for the past four years!" - a reference to school athletes who traditionally wore white hats. When no one rose, Harris stated: "Fine, I'll start shooting."



Over the next thirteen minutes Harris and Klebold moved through the library indiscriminately firing their weapons under tables and throwing pipe bombs; some students were taunted, others were shot execution style, and some feigned death. In all, the gunmen killed ten students and injured twelve others in the library. One teacher had called 911 and left the line open; an audio recording of the events were captured by the 911 system.

When Harris and Klebold left the library, the remaining students, with the exception of two who were unconscious, evacuated through an emergency exit. One teacher and the library staff went to a nearby break room and locked themselves in. After regaining consciousness, one student dropped out of a second story window to escape the area.

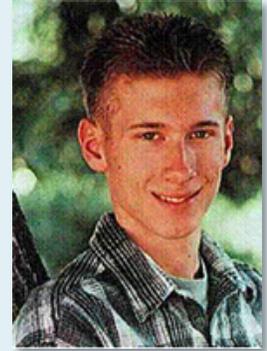
If you evacuate an area or are rescued it is important to cooperate with first responder instructions. First responders may not know all the details of the incident. They may handcuff you and detain you while they confirm identities. Follow their instructions and provide them information you feel would assist them, but do not try to actively assist them in any way.



After leaving the library, Harris and Klebold wandered through the school shooting randomly and setting off pipe bombs. During this time, they looked in classrooms and taunted students hiding in a bathroom but did not attempt to enter areas where additional students were. They also went back to the cafeteria and partially set off one of the propane bombs that failed to explode earlier. The resulting fire set off the school's sprinkler system.

The two eventually made their way back upstairs and re-entered the library area. There, they exchanged gunfire with law enforcement positioned outside the building. At 12:08 Harris and Klebold moved to one of the tables in the library and turned their weapons on themselves. The massacre was over.

The cause of the attack on Columbine is still debated. Some believe bullying by other students might have been a contributing factor. Others believe the influence of certain musical artists and video games was at least partially responsible. Still others point to a potential political agenda noting the original date of the attack was 19 April; the six year anniversary of the incident at Waco, TX and the four year anniversary of the Oklahoma City bombing. Regardless of the root causes of the incident, both Harris and Klebold demonstrated behavior prior to the attack that could have indicated a threat.

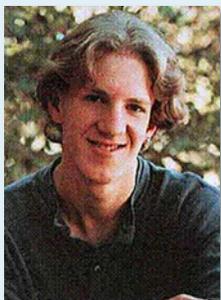


Eric Harris had confirmed mental issues. Harris was a patient of at least one psychologist and had been prescribed Luvox, a drug used to treat depression and compulsive-obsessive disorders. By his own admission, Harris suffered from depression, anger, and suicidal thoughts. His anger manifested itself in an online blog where he threatened other students. The mother of one student contacted police concerning the threats. The police investigated the threats but could not confirm that Harris was the administrator of the blog.

Unlike Harris, Dylan Klebold was not known to have had any previous psychiatric help, but he was known to abuse alcohol. Like Harris, Klebold exhibited violent tendencies. One of Klebold's teachers notified his parents and the school counselor of an essay he had written that she considered inappropriate and "ghastly."

Both Harris and Klebold had prior run-ins with law enforcement, most notably for felony theft. However, since both were minors they were able to complete a divergence program that included classes in anger management and then put on probation.

[Abuse of prescription drugs and alcohol may indicate an unstable person. If you perceive a potential threat, warn security personnel, your supervisor, or your sponsor. Recognizing and reporting unstable behavior in others may get them the help they need and prevent a dangerous incident.](#)



There were also opportunities during the year-long attack planning and preparation phase to recognize and report a threat. Most notably, Harris discussed bomb making on his blog and reported the number of bombs he had made and the types of guns and ammunition he had collected. He also made violent statements on his site such as "I hate you people for leaving me out of so many fun things." He also posted a kill list.

Harris and Klebold also brought others unwittingly into their plot. A fellow

employee who worked with Harris and Klebold at a local pizza parlor was enlisted to purchase one of the weapons used in the attack. Another person, taken to the high school prom by Klebold, also purchased three guns used in the attack from a vendor at a gun show.

Others witnessed activity that could have indicated a threat. Employees at the pizza parlor witnessed the two set off fireworks and detonate dry ice bombs behind the pizza parlor and on the roof. Harris reportedly brought a pipe bomb into the shop on one occasion. After obtaining their weapons, Harris, Klebold, and others made video tapes of them target practicing in the foothills near Columbine. The tapes, which contained violent references, were shown to other students in the school's audio-visual lab. Other times, friends were invited out with Harris and Klebold to test bomb construction and detonation techniques.

[If you notice potentially violent behavior, you should contact security personnel or local law enforcement immediately.](#)

Besides the two gunmen, thirteen people -- twelve students and one teacher -- lost their lives at Columbine High School. In addition to those killed, 21 were injured directly by the actions of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. Another three were injured while trying to escape the area.

After the tragedy, Columbine High School was closed for the remainder of the academic year. After an extensive renovation, the school reopened nearly four months later on 17 August 1999.

