

Jeffco community says people must report threats

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Mar. 7, 2001 - Tell someone.

That was the advice Tuesday from Columbine families, school officials and students as the nation grieved over the worst school shooting since the April 1999 attack in Jefferson County.

"They have to tell someone. They have to share this information with someone if they know a friend who is thinking about doing something," Columbine High principal Frank DeAngelis said.

Charles Andrew Williams, a 15-year-old freshman at Santana High School in Santee, Calif., reportedly told friends over the weekend that he planned to seek his revenge against school bullies.

When pressed, Williams said he was joking. But some friends were concerned enough to search his book bag. They didn't find anything, and they hadn't told parents, teachers or anyone else - until after Monday's shooting left two students dead and 13 people wounded.

Brad Bernall, whose 17-year-old daughter, Cassie, was killed at Columbine, said all threats, even subtle ones, should be taken seriously.

"I am so sorry that the murdered students' families must now know the pain that too many of us are already living, and that they will miss their children every day as we miss our Cassie," Bernall said.

"Until we parents practice active parenting, and know what our kids are doing, the heartache will most likely continue," he said.

Columbine students said teachers and staff have worked harder at communicating with students.

"They just keep more aware now," said Dustin Jabin, a 15-year-old sophomore. "They pay more attention to what kids say." Jabin said he didn't think there were many cases of kids reporting threats this year, but there were quite a few in 2000. Exact numbers were unavailable Tuesday.

He also said Columbine students don't make offhand threats to their friends anymore. DeAngelis addressed the entire school for five minutes before classes started Tuesday. DeAngelis told students about the shootings and said additional counselors would be available on campus.

"I think every time something like this occurs, it retraumatizes the Columbine community," DeAngelis told The Denver Post. "I know seeing the television footage brought back some memories for me. Our thoughts and prayers go out to the victims and their families."

DeAngelis also told students that he spoke to Santana's principal and offered his support. Santana was one of the high schools that sent cards to Columbine in 1999.

Postcards were given to Columbine students Tuesday so that they could write letters to their peers at Santana.

Security was not increased at Columbine on Tuesday, but campus supervisors made their presence known.

Jeanne Oliver, a spokeswoman for the Jefferson Center for Mental Health, said the center saw an increase in calls and walk-in visits to its Columbine Connections outreach center. "We're seeing a number of calls from concerned parents, wondering about their children and concerned maybe about their behaviors," she said.

Oliver said the Santana shooting's timing may have made some members of the Columbine community more sensitive and emotional. The second-year anniversary of the Columbine shootings is a month and a half away. Oliver also said she expects calls and visits to continue for the next few days before things calm down.

Some students at Columbine said the Santana gunman's claims that he was bullied were not enough to justify the shooting.

Ron Huddleston, president of Safe Kids America, said not enough is known about the Santana teen to disregard his bullying claims. Safe Kids America is a San Francisco-based organization that promotes safety education and self-defense for kids.

"I can't speak for the young man who pulled the trigger, but we all have breaking points," Huddleston said. "I don't know his background. Some kids can take (the bullying) and never break. Others, it could be one time or it could be several times." Denver Post staff writer Susan Besze Wallace contributed to this report.