

## **Kids & Bombs: What to Watch for and How to Prevent Disaster**

PoliceOne columnist and explosives expert Shawn Hughes was recently interviewed by the media on the topic of at-risk youth and bomb-making. Below are the answers he gave which can be helpful to you not only as police officers, but as parents. It can also serve as good information for you to share with other parents in your area.

### **Q: How hard is it for a child to make a bomb?**

It's easy for anyone to make a bomb. People would like to blame the Internet, but data has been available for much, much longer than that. Before the Internet there were books and manuals. And, at their heart, all bombs are basic organic chemistry and electricity. You'll never be able to ban either of those subjects, so, there will always be bomb data available. As far as the physical componentry, it's available pretty much anywhere. Our military enemies even used our garbage against us.

### **Q: What should a concerned parent look for?**

Many "experts" have a list of behaviors to look for. I have reviewed most all of their lists and arrived at this conclusion: they all describe every average teenager at some point (or points) in their life.

The best practice for mitigating dangerous behavior is twofold. It isn't easy and it is quite time-consuming. First, get to know your child. You should know what interests your child, their likes and dislikes. You should know who they hang out with, and why. You should be interested enough in your children to be able to spot emotional behavior that is beyond their norm...behavior that may indicate something traumatic has happened in their lives.

In the same vein, your children's' lives should be structured. Encouraging them to find themselves is perfectly acceptable, but you should be setting the "where, when, and not." Allowing children to roam, whenever and wherever they choose, and doing whatever they want, in actuality creates an environment where children believe that the parent or parents don't care, and fosters feelings that encourage them to find ways to 'act out' in order to attract attention.

Second point of action is that while parents should allow their children some privacy, there shouldn't be a great deal of it. Allowing them large areas that are off-limits to parental intervention such as their bedroom, a garage, or "club house/hang out" place, provides them with an environment where they can have sex, produce and consume drugs and alcohol, and create explosives. I have heard the tired old argument that children will experiment, so parents should provide them a safe haven to do so. In response I can only suggest that these misguided people talk to the parents of children who are no longer here because of things that could have been prevented by simply making it clear that certain behaviors are unacceptable and will be punished. And, of course, punish them when indicators appear.

**Q: How expensive is it to make a seriously dangerous bomb?**

Well, let's define "seriously dangerous bomb." You can make one that would fit that definition for around \$20. But it would only be dangerous for a few people in a small radius. You can't take down a building or a school bus with twenty bucks. A large device, capable of medium-scale destruction of property or people, while still fairly straightforward to make, requires some capital to assemble. Hence my admonition that parents should be interested in and involved with their children. Where is that allowance or after-school paycheck going? Is it in a savings account for clothes or perhaps a car? Or is it going to marijuana or bomb precursors?

**Q: Should parents take bomb threats seriously?**

Bomb threats should always be taken seriously, but do not mandatorily require an evacuation either. There is a program that allows staff to evaluate the seriousness of a threat and take appropriate actions. This training can come from a private person, such as me, or from the ATF.

**Q: What kind of things should a parent be looking for when they are snooping?**

Describing bomb componentry takes a great deal of time, and it's something we prefer not to discuss publicly. The simplest method for parents is to physically go where their children hang out or live such as the aforementioned bedroom, garage, wherever and ask the question, "Why do you need this?" Nobody does chemistry experiments at home so, why all the chemicals? You're not a cook, so why do you need all these timers? You're not an artist, and neither is your buddy Boomer (and, coincidentally, why *do* people call him that, anyway??), so what's with all these parts you two have collected? Look past the answers. Question their answers. Most people, adults included, do not create back stories to their lies, so questioning deeper usually will reveal inconsistencies that will lead the concerned parent to the truth.

Finally, go to some drug sites on the Internet. Look at what's popular. If the things you've seen isn't for partying, then what *are* they for? Take digital pictures and seek out your School Resource Officer. They will be able to help you. No, you aren't betraying your child to the police. You are saving him from himself, and potentially others as well.

On the other hand, sometimes a timer is just a timer. Most children do not plan to kill everyone. Most do simply go through a phase. So, don't go overboard and be totally distrustful to start with. Give your child the chance to fail, but keep a weather eye out for trouble, too. You can always be friends when they are out of college with kids of their own!

**Q: Are there any final thoughts you'd like to share?**

Sure. Not every child that builds a bomb is a terrorist-in-training. Some are simply curious. In fact, I got my start in bomb disposal as a child bomb builder. I found it more interesting to take apart the ones that didn't work than making ones that did. Try not to be too quick to judge, but never be too slow to act. A little interest in your child now can save a great deal of attention by the authorities later. Source: PoliceOne