

A Teddy Bear's Dreams Are Dashed in Sandy Hook Promise's Gut-Punching Ad

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A teddy bear is typically a symbol of childhood innocence, comfort, and play. But in a harrowing ad from nonprofit Sandy Hook Promise, the stuffed animal serves as a stark reminder of how the gun violence epidemic is impacting childhoods across the U.S.

As the organization's latest public service announcement (PSA) reminds viewers, teddy bears are also often left at memorials in the aftermath of school shootings. The campaign centers around the notion that kids deserve to be kids, and that school shootings are preventable.

"A Teddy Bear's Dream," created by agency BBDO New York and directed by Henry-Alex Rubin through production company Smuggler, at first appears to be a sweet story told through the eyes of a teddy bear. After a little girl picks out the toy in a store, the bear imagines a new life with the girl—playing, coloring, and riding bikes—to a light-hearted soundtrack of "Best of Friends" from Disney's classic 1981 film, *The Fox and the Hound*.

The story takes a turn, however, when the true purpose of the

teddy bear is revealed. The girl leaves it at a memorial for a school shooting, before images of multiple shrines from numerous tragedies appear on screen.

The teddy bear symbol has a direct link to the 2012 mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT. Following the tragedy, 60,000 bears were sent to Newtown—so many that a storage facility was required.

Along with the PSA, Sandy Hook Promise has created a guide about how to recognize the warning signs before school shootings. It is also selling a limited-edition teddy bear called the “Hope Bear,” with all proceeds going to gun violence prevention educational programs.

Today (March 10), the nonprofit revealed that it recently helped prevent a planned school shooting in Florida after receiving more than 40 tips about threatening social media messages to its Say Something Anonymous Reporting System. Following an investigation, Florida authorities determined the 14-year-old student had a plan for an attack and charged them with threatening communications or threats of a mass shooting, according to Sandy Hook Promise.

The organization also said that since its creation in 2018, it has helped prevent at least 18 credible planned school shootings. With this campaign, Sandy Hook Promise wants to raise awareness of its services and educate others about how to prevent violence.

“All across this country, there are tragic stories we will never hear about because a brave upstander recognized warning signs and did something to prevent a violent act,” said Nicole Hockley, co-founder and co-CEO of Sandy Hook Promise, whose son Dylan was killed in the Sandy Hook shooting. “We all have a role to play in preserving childhood innocence and ensuring a teddy bear stays just that—an enduring symbol of childhood innocence and imagination.”

Eight in 10 parents feel the threat of school violence has affected childhood today, according to a February survey from KRC Research.

BBD0 NY has worked with Sandy Hook Promise over the past decade, including on the 2020 Emmy Award-winning PSA, "Back-to-School Essentials."

"We're still steadfast in our commitment to educate people to know the signs of school shootings," Chris Beresford-Hill, worldwide chief creative officer of BBD0, said in a statement, adding that the agency's ads for Sandy Hook Promise have engaged millions of viewers and garnered more than 300 industry awards.

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