

# IT'S NO JOKE

... felony charges  
and expulsion, school districts warn

Herald Tribune

Florida girl, 12, arrested after threatening

## The Department of Juvenile Justice Resource Guide on School Threats



*The It's No Joke awareness campaign created by the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice is aimed at reducing school threats made by students in Florida. Such threats can result in felony charges. The It's No Joke campaign further seeks to educate youth and parents that threats of violence include statements made anywhere online. Making threats, even if in jest, can have serious consequences.*

*To reduce incidents of school threats, DJJ has developed this resource guide to educate, encourage and support parents and guardians as they strive to keep their children safe, healthy, and free from potentially long-term effects of even joking about threatening a school.*

### Understanding School Threats Law

Any person who communicates a threat to kill, do great bodily injury, conduct a mass shooting or an act of terrorism in a way that another person could view it commits a felony of the second degree under statute 836.10. The communication does not need to be sent directly to another person to be considered a threat. If any person can see the message, it is a threat.

### **It is against the law to send a threatening message through:**

- Social media status updates or direct messages
- Snapchat messages or stories
- Videos on platforms like TikTok or YouTube
- Text messages
- Gaming servers or chats such as Discord
- Anonymous chat rooms or posting sites like Whisper or AskFM
- Anywhere else the message can be seen!



# DO YOU KNOW YOUR APPS?



## It's No Joke—A Family Affected by Online Threats

In the digital age, there are more ways than ever to communicate. This opens the door for more mediums and opportunities to break the law as well. For one family, the message of the Department of Juvenile Justice's (DJJ) "It's No Joke" campaign is all too real. Youth "A" was a normal high school student until the course of his life was altered by a post he made on social media. The parents of youth "A" shared their family's story with DJJ in an effort to prevent other families from experiencing what they continue to go through today as a result of online threats.

Under statute 836.10, school threats made on any of these platforms could be charged as a felony! Help protect your child by understanding what apps they use and how, and ensure they are used responsibly.



**Snapchat** - Photos and messages can be sent directly to friends or to stories that can be seen by anyone who has been added as a friend. Because photos disappear after they are viewed by friends or 24 hours after they are posted to a story, some youth may think they have more anonymity, but photos can easily be saved by those who view



**Whatsapp** - Youth who have restricted text message or data plans may use this to have lengthier conversations, or may use the app to hide conversations they do not want their parents to discover.



**Discord** - a service for web and mobile that allows for the creation of video, audio and text chatrooms. Many youth use this service to communicate with friends or strangers while gaming online. Messages posted to chatrooms or "servers" can be viewed and saved by anyone in the room, even if they are not participating in the conversation.



**TikTok** - a mobile app where users share short videos publicly. Many youth use the app to perform skits or take part in social media "challenges" - some of which can be against the law.



**ASKfm** - A platform where users ask questions and receive answers anonymously, which creates the perfect storm for threats and cyberbullying.

There are many more apps used by teens available, and new trends arise every day. It is important to be aware of these platforms to stay up to date with the media your child is using.

Youth "A" came home after a day at school like any other and posted content he believed to be in jest to a popular social media app. His parents, like so many others, were not familiar with the app or with school threats laws as they pertained to online communication until their son was arrested for his post.

***"We were shocked that our son was being arrested for something like this; we felt powerless and at a disadvantage."***

While the charges against youth "A" were dropped when he was determined not to be a threat, his life continues to be affected by the arrest. He is not permitted to return to his school and is missing out on many high school experiences and memories. He and his family continue to be affected by media coverage of the incident and fear for how this will affect his future. For the family, the one silver lining is the opportunity to use their story to caution other parents.

***"We had no idea that this was something he could be arrested for. Unfortunately this is something that we had to learn the hard way. We hope that other parents and children will learn from this mistake."***

It is their hope that the story and information in this guide will help families in similar situations and assist parents in preventing school threats.

## Additional Resources

### Fortify Florida

[www.getfortifyfl.com](http://www.getfortifyfl.com)

FortifyFL is a suspicious activity reporting tool that allows you to instantly relay information to appropriate law enforcement agencies and school officials. Download the app on the Apple App Store® or Google Play™ store.

### Hope for Healing

[www.hopeforhealingfl.com](http://www.hopeforhealingfl.com)

First Lady Casey DeSantis' Hope for Healing Florida is an initiative about helping good people in crisis by leveraging the resources of our state agencies, private partners and our administration. If you or your family are in need of resources for dealing with substance abuse or mental health issues, find resources in your area on the Hope for Healing website.

### DJJ Community Resource Guide

[www.djj.state.fl.us](http://www.djj.state.fl.us)

Located on the main page of DJJ's website is an interactive guide with localized resources for a variety of issues that may affect youth. Follow the link and select your area on the map to find

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# TALKING TO YOUTH ABOUT SCHOOL THREATS



Preventing school threats starts at home. Consider the suggestions below to get to know your child's school environment and engage them about the topic of school threats.

## 1. Engage in conversation with your child about their school life.

Building and maintaining an active and engaged relationship with your children is critical as they mature. Although becoming independent and learning to make your own decisions is an important part of growing up, parents are encouraged to be involved in guiding their children and offering support and direction to ensure they stay on the right track. Converse with your child about not only their curriculum but their school social life to understand the trends, pressures or influences they deal with on an every day basis.

## 2. Become informed about the social media they use.

Use of social media is at an all time high. It is important as a parent to become familiar with the popular social media apps, what they do, and who they can reach using them. It is imperative that you know how your child communicates (video, picture, chat, text) on apps they use and who they are communicating with. Ask your child what they like to do online, and periodically check their profiles for content safety.

## 3. Discuss current events and relevant legislation.

Often times youth are not aware of the media coverage adults see about school threats, violence and social issues. This can lead to youth making uninformed decisions about what they post online resulting in content that is offensive or even illegal. Share with your child the type of statements that are considered threats in the eyes of the law. When a school threat or act of violence occurs in your area, discuss it with your child and ensure they understand the severity of such incidents.