

Terrorized, Traumatized, & Terminated: The Police State's Deadly Toll On America's Children

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[“Mommy, am I gonna die?”](#)– 4-year-old Ava Ellis after being inadvertently shot in the leg by a police officer who was aiming for the girl's boxer-terrier dog, Patches

[“Am I going to get shot again.”](#)–2-year-old survivor of a police shooting that left his three siblings, ages 1, 4 and 5, with a bullet in the brain, a fractured skull and gun wounds to the face

[Children learn what they live.](#)



As family counselor Dorothy Law Nolte wisely observed, “If children live with criticism, they learn to condemn. [If](#)

children live with hostility, they learn to fight. If children live with fear, they learn to be apprehensive."

And if children live with terror, trauma and violence – forced to watch helplessly as their loved ones are executed by police officers who shoot first and ask questions later – will they in turn learn to terrorize, traumatize and inflict violence on the world around them?

I'm not willing to risk it. Are you?

It's difficult enough raising a child in a world ravaged by war, disease, poverty and hate, but when you add the toxic stress of the police state into the mix, it becomes near impossible to protect children from the growing unease that some of the monsters of our age come dressed in government uniforms.

Case in point: in Hugo, Oklahoma, plain clothes police officers opened fire on a pickup truck parked in front of a food bank, heedless of the damage such a hail of bullets—26 shots were fired—could have on those in the vicinity. Three of the four children inside the parked vehicle were shot: a 4-year-old girl was shot in the head and ended up with a bullet in the brain; a 5-year-old boy received a skull fracture; and a 1-year-old girl had deep cuts on her face from gunfire or shattered window glass. Only the 2-year-old was spared any *physical* harm, although the terror will likely linger for a long time. "They are terrified to go anywhere or hear anything," the family attorney said. "The two-year-old keeps asking about 'Am I going to get shot again.'"

The reason for the use of such excessive force?

Police were searching for a suspect in a weeks-old robbery of a pizza parlor that netted \$400.

While the two officers involved in the shooting are pulling paid leave at taxpayer expense, the children's mother is

struggling to figure out how to care for her wounded family and pay the medical expenses, including the cost to transport each child in a separate medical helicopter to a nearby hospital: [\\$75,000 for one child's transport alone.](#)

This may be the worst use of excessive force on innocent children to date. Unfortunately, it is one of many in a steady stream of cases that speak to the need for police to de-escalate their tactics and stop resorting to excessive force when less lethal means are available to them.

For instance, in [Cleveland, police shot and killed 12-year-old Tamir Rice](#) who was seen playing on a playground with a pellet gun. Surveillance footage shows police shooting the boy [two seconds](#) after getting out of a moving patrol car. Incredibly, the shooting was deemed "reasonable" and "justified" by two law enforcement experts who concluded that the police use of force "[did not violate Tamir's constitutional rights.](#)"

In Detroit, [7-year-old Aiyana Jones was killed](#) after a Detroit SWAT team launched a flash-bang grenade into her family's apartment, broke through the door and opened fire, hitting the little girl who was asleep on the living room couch. The cops were in the wrong apartment.

In Georgia, a SWAT team launched a flash-bang grenade into the house in which Baby Bou Bou, his three sisters and his parents were staying. The [grenade landed in the 2-year-old's crib](#), burning a hole in his chest and leaving the child with scarring that a lifetime of surgeries will not be able to easily undo.

Also in Georgia, [10-year-old Dakota Corbitt was shot by a police officer](#) who aimed for an inquisitive dog, missed, and hit the young boy instead.

In Ohio, [police shot 4-year-old Ava Ellis in the leg, shattering the bone](#), after being dispatched to assist the

girl's mother, who had cut her arm and was in need of a paramedic. Cops claimed that the family pet charged the officer who was approaching the house, causing him to fire his gun and accidentally hit the little girl.

In California, 13-year-old Andy Lopez Cruz was [shot 7 times in 10 seconds](#) by a police officer who mistook the boy's toy gun for an assault rifle. Christopher Roupe, 17, was [shot and killed after opening the door to a police officer](#). The officer, mistaking the remote control in Roupe's hand for a gun, shot him in the chest.

These children are more than grim statistics on a police blotter. They are the heartbreaking casualties of the government's endless, deadly wars on terror, on drugs, and on the American people themselves.

Then you have the growing number of incidents involving children who are forced to watch helplessly as trigger-happy police open fire on loved ones and community members alike.

In Texas, an 8-year-old boy watched as police—dispatched to do a welfare check on a home with its windows open—[shot and killed his aunt through her bedroom window](#) while she was playing video games with him.

In Minnesota, a 4-year-old girl watched from the backseat of a car as [cops shot and killed her mother's boyfriend, Philando Castile, a school cafeteria supervisor, during a routine traffic stop](#) merely because Castile disclosed that he had a gun in his possession, for which he had a lawful conceal-and-carry permit. [That's all it took for police to shoot Castile four times](#) as he was reaching for his license and registration.

In Arizona, a 7-year-old girl watched panic-stricken as a state trooper pointed his gun at her and her father during a traffic stop and reportedly [threatened to shoot her father in](#)

the back (twice) based on the mistaken belief that they were driving a stolen rental car.

In Oklahoma, a 5-year-old boy watched as a police officer used a high-powered rifle to shoot his dog Opie multiple times in his family's backyard while other children were also present. The police officer was mistakenly attempting to deliver a warrant on a 10-year-old case for someone who hadn't lived at that address in a decade.

A Minnesota SWAT team actually burst into one family's house, shot the family's dog, handcuffed the children and forced them to "sit next to the carcass of their dead and bloody pet for more than an hour." They later claimed it was the wrong house.

More than 80% of American communities have their own SWAT teams, with more than 80,000 of these paramilitary raids are carried out every year. That translates to more than 200 SWAT team raids every day in which police crash through doors, damage private property, terrorize adults and children alike, kill family pets, assault or shoot anyone that is perceived as threatening—and all in the pursuit of someone merely *suspected* of a crime, usually some small amount of drugs.

A child doesn't even have to be directly exposed to a police shooting to learn the police state's lessons in compliance and terror, which are being meted out with every SWAT team raid, roadside strip search, and school drill.

Indeed, there can be no avoiding the hands-on lessons being taught in the schools about the role of police in our lives, ranging from active shooter drills and school-wide lockdowns to incidents in which children engaging in typically childlike behavior are suspended (for shooting an imaginary "arrow" at a fellow classmate), handcuffed (for being disruptive at school), arrested (for throwing water balloons as part of a

school prank), and even tasered ([for not obeying instructions](#)).

For example, a middle school in Washington State went on [lockdown after a student brought a toy gun to class](#). A Boston high school went into [lockdown for four hours after a bullet was discovered in a classroom](#). A North Carolina elementary school locked down and called in police after a [fifth grader reported seeing an unfamiliar man in the school](#) (it turned out to be a parent).

Cops have even gone so far as to fire blanks during school active shooter drills around the country. Teachers at one elementary school in Indiana were actually [shot “execution style” with plastic pellets](#). Students at a high school in Florida were so terrified after administrators tricked them into believing that a shooter drill was, in fact, an actual attack that some of them began texting their parents “goodbye.”

Better safe than sorry is the rationale offered to those who worry that these drills are terrorizing and traumatizing young children. As journalist Dahlia Lithwick points out: “I don’t recall any serious national public dialogue about lockdown protocols or how they became the norm. It seems simply to have begun, [modeling itself on the lockdowns that occur during prison riots](#), and then spread until school lockdowns and lockdown drills are as common for our children as fire drills, and as routine as duck-and-cover drills were in the 1950s.”

These drills have, indeed, become routine.

As the *New York Times* [reports](#): “Most states have passed laws requiring schools to devise safety plans, and several states, including Michigan, Kentucky and North Dakota, specifically require lockdown drills. Some drills are as simple as a principal making an announcement and students sitting quietly in a darkened classroom. At other schools, police officers and

school officials playact a shooting, stalking through the halls like gunmen and testing whether doors have been locked.”

Police officers at a Florida middle school carried out an active shooter drill in an effort to educate students about how to respond in the event of an actual shooting crisis. Two armed [officers, guns loaded and drawn, burst into classrooms, terrorizing the students](#) and placing the school into lockdown mode.

What is particularly chilling is how effective these lessons in compliance are in indoctrinating young people to accept their role in the police state, either as criminals or prison guards.

If these exercises are intended to instill fear, paranoia and compliance into young people, they’re working.

As Joe Pinsker writes for *The Atlantic*:

These lockdowns can be scarring, causing some kids to cry and wet themselves. Others have written letters bidding their family goodbye or drafted wills that specify what to do with their belongings. And 57 percent of teens worry that a shooting will happen at their school, according to a Pew Research Center survey from last year. Though many children are no strangers to violence in their homes and communities, [the pervasiveness of lockdowns and school-shooting drills in the U.S. has created a culture of fear that touches nearly every child across the country.](#)

Sociologist Alice Goffman understands how far-reaching the impact of such “exercises” can be on young people. For six years, Goffman lived in a low-income urban neighborhood, documenting the impact such an environment—a microcosm of the police state—has on its residents. Her account of neighborhood children playing cops and robbers speaks volumes about how [constant exposure to pat downs, strip searches,](#)

[surveillance and arrests can result in a populace that meekly allows itself to be prodded, poked and stripped.](#)

As journalist Malcolm Gladwell writing for the *New Yorker* [reports](#):

Goffman sometimes saw young children playing the age-old game of cops and robbers in the street, only the child acting the part of the robber wouldn't even bother to run away: I saw children give up running and simply stick their hands behind their back, as if in handcuffs; push their body up against a car without being asked; or lie flat on the ground and put their hands over their head. The children yelled, "I'm going to lock you up! I'm going to lock you up, and you ain't never coming home!" I once saw a six-year-old pull another child's pants down to do a "cavity search."

Clearly, our children are getting the message, but it's not the message that was intended by those who fomented a revolution and wrote our founding documents. Their philosophy was that the police work for us, and "we the people" are the masters, and they are to be our servants.

Now that philosophy has been turned on its head, fueled by our fears (some legitimate, some hyped along by the government and its media mouthpieces) about the terrors and terrorists that lurk among us.

What are we to tell our nation's children about the role of police in their lives?

Do we parrot the government line that [police officers are community helpers](#) who are to be trusted and obeyed at all times? Do we caution them to steer clear of a police officer, warning them that any interactions could have disastrous consequences? Or is there some happy medium between the two that, while being neither fairy tale nor horror story, can serve as a cautionary tale for young people who will encounter

police at virtually every turn?

Certainly, it's getting harder by the day to insist that we live in a nation that values freedom and which is governed by the rule of law.

Yet unless something changes and soon, there will soon be nothing left to teach young people about freedom as we have known it beyond remembered stories of the "good old days."

For starters, as I point out in my book [*Battlefield America: The War on the American People*](#), **it's time to take a hard look at the greatest perpetrators of violence in our culture—the U.S. government and its agents—and do something about it:** de-militarize the police, prohibit the Pentagon from distributing military weapons to domestic police agencies, train the police in de-escalation techniques, stop insulating police officers from charges of misconduct and wrongdoing, and require police to take precautionary steps before engaging in violence in the presence of young people.

We must stop the carnage.