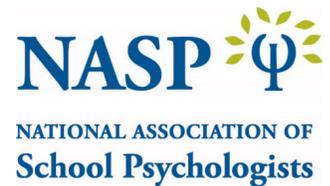


NASP Condemns Hate Speech and Violence, Calls on Schools to Reinforce Safe, Supportive School Environments for All Students



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Bethesda, MD—The past 2 weeks in the United States have been fraught with serious incidents of hate and violence. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) strongly condemns *all* hate speech and crimes, racist behavior, antisemitism, misogyny, xenophobia, and any behavior that undermines our collective sense of decency and security as a nation and threatens the sense of personal safety for millions of people in targeted populations across the country. Our deepest sympathies are with all those directly affected by the recent horrific shootings in Jeffersontown, KY, Pittsburgh, PA, and Tallahassee, FL.

Such hate and acts of violence must stop.

As a nation, we have much to do to address the underlying causes of hate-based behavior, including changing the tone of our national discourse and enforcing civil rights and other legal protections. As parents, caregivers, and educators, we have a critical responsibility to help children and youth feel safe and secure and learn how to engage with others of differing viewpoints in a peaceful, tolerant, and respectful manner.

Schools are essential to this process. It is imperative that educators create positive school communities in which violence is not tolerated; people at risk are identified and helped; inequity is addressed; problem solving, rather than blame and disregard for challenges, is the norm; and people of all backgrounds, races, religions, and cultures are valued and engaged as equals. Specific recommendations include:

Reinforce a sense of positive school community. Establishing positive relationships between adults and students is foundational to safe, successful learning environments. Such relationships are built on a sense of mutual trust and respect. Maintain culturally and linguistically responsive practices and ensure that students and their families feel connected and engaged. We function as a society *only* when we have that shared sense of relationship; helping children identify and develop those relationships is vital.

Reassure children that adults will take care of them. Many children and youth may feel at risk. It is important to reinforce strategies to ensure both physical and psychological safety. Remind adults and students of the importance of supporting each other during difficult times and acknowledge people will have a variety of emotions. If students feel physically or psychologically unsafe, they need to know how to report incidents, and trusted adults must be there to validate and respond to their concerns.

Model and teach desired behaviors. We know that adult actions and attitudes influence children. Adults can help children and youth manage their reactions to events in the news and their communities by understanding their feelings, modeling healthy coping strategies, and closely monitoring their own emotional states and that of those in their care. Identifying and redirecting negative thoughts and feelings can help to teach children social–emotional skills and problem solving. **Adults should never engage in mocking, belittling, or threatening behavior.**

Help children manage strong emotions. For many children and youth, incidents of violence, media images, and messages to which they are exposed can trigger a range of strong emotions. Some children may experience anger or stress; others may feel a sense of fear. Children’s emotions often spill over into schools. Help children understand the range of emotions that they are feeling and learn to express them in appropriate and respectful ways. For children experiencing stress, we can help by spending time with them, encouraging them to talk about their feelings, maintaining a sense of normalcy in their schedules and activities, and teaching coping strategies.

Reinforce acceptance and appreciation for diversity as critical American values. Acknowledge that everyone is entitled to their personal opinions but that hateful or intolerant comments about others’ cultures, sexual orientations, religions, or races—or any other comments that are meant to hurt or make another feel threatened, unsafe, or unwelcome—will not be tolerated. **This includes adult behavior.**

Stop any type of harassment or bullying immediately. Make it clear that such behavior is unacceptable. Talk to the children involved about the reasons for their behavior. Offer alternative methods of expressing their anger, confusion, or insecurity, and provide supports for those who are subject to bullying. School staff should encourage students to continue to be respectful of others.

Encourage children to channel their views and feelings into positive action. Like adults, children and youth are empowered by the ability to do the right thing and help others. Working with classmates or members of the community who come from different backgrounds not only enables children to feel that they are making a positive contribution, it also reinforces their sense of commonality with diverse people.

School psychologists play a critical role in helping schools create supportive learning environments. They work with school staff and families to establish positive school climates; prevent bullying, harassment, and violence; establish equitable and culturally responsive policies and practices; and support students’ mental health. Related NASP resources include:

- [Bullying Prevention & Intervention in Schools](#)
- [Racism, Prejudice, & Discrimination](#)
- [Safe and Supportive Schools for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning \(LGBTQ+\) Youth](#)
- [Resolution: Affirming the Rights to Safe and Supportive Schools and Communities for All Students](#)

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