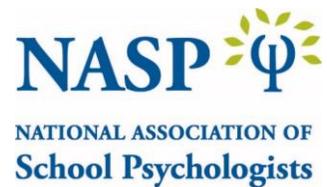


Press Release

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Contact: Katherine Cowan, Director, Communications
301-347-1665 • kcowan@naspweb.org



Parkland and Other Anniversaries Offer Opportunity to Highlight Effective School Safety Efforts

Bethesda, MD—This spring marks the first anniversary of the shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida and Santa Fe High School in Texas, as well as the 12-year anniversary of the shootings at Virginia Tech and the 20-year anniversary of the shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado. For members of these communities, such anniversaries can have significant emotional and psychological impact, known as the anniversary effect. They also often result in considerable media attention, which has the potential to extend the impact to other individuals and communities.

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) encourages school leaders to be attentive to the potential needs of students and staff who might be affected by the anniversary of a traumatic event, and it has released [guidance](#) for educators, families, and students. NASP also urges the media to avoid coverage that focuses on overly dramatized details of the events, which can trigger intense emotions and reactions in vulnerable individuals. Similarly, intensive attention to the perpetrators risks spurring potential copycat behaviors. Instead, media should focus on the strides school communities are making toward recovery and efforts across the country to prevent school and community violence.

“This is an important time to highlight the positive steps schools are taking to improve school safety,” says Lisa Kelly-Vance, President of NASP. “Schools have made tremendous progress in implementing strategies to support students and reduce violence of all types. As educators, we can take this opportunity to reinforce both the fact that schools are generally very safe and the important role that all members of the school community play in promoting ongoing safety.”

“Our challenge is to avoid ineffective sound-bite fixes, such as arming school staff, and stay focused on proven effective approaches to reducing violence,” notes Kelly-Vance. “We cannot turn our schools into fortresses. Genuinely effective school safety efforts protect the physical and psychological safety of students and staff.” To truly improve school safety and reduce violence, we must:

- 1. Create welcoming, supportive learning environments.** Students need to feel connected and included in their school communities. It is critical to enhance school connectedness and trust between students and adults, as well as to reinforce open communication and the importance of reporting concerns about someone hurting themselves or others. All students should have at least one trusted adult in the school to whom they can turn for support and guidance. School psychologists play an integral role in working with administrators and teachers to ensure that building systems and policies are conducive to developing these kinds of relationships and creating safe and supportive conditions for learning.

2. **Increase access to comprehensive mental and behavioral health services and supports in schools.** Only a fraction of students in need of mental health services actually receive them, and among those that do, the majority access these services in school. Schools are an ideal place both to promote mental wellness and to identify and support students struggling with mental health issues. School-employed mental health professionals, like school psychologists, can help guide school-wide prevention and intervention mental and behavioral health services, provide direct services to students in need of support, help teachers and other school staff understand the warning signs that individuals may be at risk of causing harm to themselves or others, and provide appropriate threat and suicide risk assessments and supports to identified students.
3. **Implement school safety initiatives that balance psychological and physical safety.** Effective school safety efforts should utilize evidence-based practices to ensure the well-being of all students in addition to their physical safety. Reasonable building security measures, such as secure doors, lighted and monitored hallways and check in/check out systems for visitors, are important. However, an overemphasis on extreme physical security measures alone, such as metal detectors and arming school staff, will not improve school safety and, in fact, may undermine student perceptions of safety and schools' ability to ensure an effective learning environment.
4. **Establish trained school safety and crisis teams.** A primary goal should be to reinforce learning as well as safety. Schools and districts need trained school safety and crisis teams and plans that are consistently reviewed and practiced. Training should encompass ongoing prevention and early intervention as well as response and recovery in the event the unpreventable occurs. This includes conducting effective lockdown drills and collaborating with community responders. **Importantly, schools should NOT conduct surprise active shooter drills.** Unannounced lockdown or live simulation drills can cause serious distress for students, staff, and families who may believe the threat of an armed assailant is real, which can cause a trauma reaction.
5. **Enact and uphold gun laws that prevent access to firearms by those who have the potential to cause harm to themselves or others.** We must do more to reduce inappropriate access to firearms by adopting commonsense gun safety measures, including: rigorous enforcement of existing gun laws; eliminating inappropriate youth access to guns; improving awareness and adherence to safe gun practices, including secure storage of firearms; restricting the presence of guns in schools to only commissioned and trained school resource officers; and keeping guns out of the hands of individuals deemed at risk of hurting themselves and others, such as through red flag laws. We also must fund increased public health research on gun violence.

NASP remains committed to working to make more universal the policies and practices that we know enable ALL children to thrive in school, at home, and throughout life.

Relevant NASP Resources

- [Anniversaries of Traumatic Events: Guidance for Educators](#)
- [A Framework for Safe and Successful Schools](#)
- [PREPaRE School Crisis Prevention and Intervention Training Curriculum](#)
- [Best Practice Considerations for School Armed Assailant Drills](#)
- [NASP Position Paper on School Violence Prevention](#)
- [NASP Resolution to Support Efforts to Prevent Gun Violence](#)

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