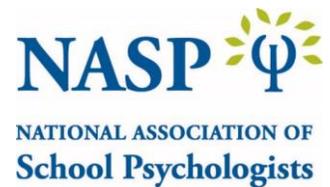


# Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Katherine Cowan, Director, Communications  
301-347-1665 • [kcowan@naspweb.org](mailto:kcowan@naspweb.org)



## NASP Condemns Hate-Driven Violence, Urges Schools to Reinforce Students' Safety, Well-Being

Bethesda, MD—The past 10 days in the United States have been fraught with horrific acts of violence against innocent people in public spaces. It is heartbreaking and deeply troubling on many levels. Our deepest sympathies are with those directly affected by the trauma, injury, and loss. NASP shares the growing sense of outrage and urgency and joins with the nation in demanding that our leaders act to end this violence now.

Many issues can contribute to an individual or group turning to violence, but common across these incidents is the influence of hate and access to guns. Yes, mental health can play a role, and we must improve access to mental health services across the country. But we must also enact commonsense gun safety laws, such as universal background checks, bans on high-capacity weapons, and red flag laws.

We *must* address the underlying causes of hate-based speech and behavior that undermine our collective sense of decency and security as a nation and threaten the sense of personal safety for millions of people in targeted populations across the country. It is imperative that we change the tone of our national discourse, including condemning hate speech of all kinds at all levels of society. As we saw in Gilroy, El Paso, and Dayton, failure to do so puts our children and families at grave risk.

### Back-to-School

It is particularly concerning that our nation's children are returning to school against the backdrop of this painful reality. While schools remain among the safest places for children, it would be irresponsible not to acknowledge and be prepared for a real sense of threat and anxiety among some students, either generalized because of exposure to media coverage of the events or specific for students who feel targeted because of who they are. We need to ensure that all of our children see "back-to-school" as the beginning of a year of possibilities and growth, not risk and vulnerability.

Specifically, 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. We must 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 the following.

***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 core 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**

- [Talking to Children About Violence: Tips for Parents and Teachers](#)
- [NASP Resolution to Support Efforts to Prevent Gun Violence](#)
- [School Violence Prevention: Guidelines for Administrators and Crisis Teams](#)
- [Supporting Marginalized Students in Stressful Times: Tips for Educators](#)
- [Supporting Vulnerable Children in Stressful Times: Tips for Parents](#)
- [Bullying Prevention & Intervention in Schools](#)
- [Racism, Prejudice, & Discrimination](#)

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