



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
School Psychologists

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Bethesda, MD: The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) joins the nation in sorrow and outrage at the senseless acts of violence in Minnesota, Louisiana, and Texas this week. The level of anger and violence occurring in this country is unacceptable. Shootings of citizens, innocent children, and police officers doing their job are the heartbreaking symptoms of serious underlying societal problems and the fraying of a shared civil experience and discourse.

As a country, we must address the long-term issues of poverty, inequity, prejudice, racism, divisiveness, and violence. As parents, caregivers, and educators, we have a critical responsibility to help children and youth see adults as keeping them safe, understand the challenges at hand within a problem-solving context, and see themselves as active participants in our collective national commitment to liberty and justice for all.

It is our hope that the nation will take a lesson or two from how effective schools contribute—on a daily basis—to children’s understanding of what it means to be part of a positive community. Positive communities are those 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, colors, and cultures are valued and engaged as equals.

School communities succeed in large measure because they maintain values that shape a positive learning environment. These values are expressed in the following ways.

Adults 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.

What we say and how we say it matters. The current political and media environment greatly contributes to the increase in hateful dialogue and reactive anger, which only serves to further undermine our ability to find solutions to our problems. Adults should model civil discourse and provide opportunities to engage children and youth in conversations that focus on common goals rather than labeling groups of people for individual behavior.

Other people’s perspectives matter. The very nature of civil disagreement is to acknowledge respectfully the views and experiences of other people and learn from differing perspectives. Adults can start by reflecting on their own experiences and how these shape their interactions and reactions. They can help children to do the same and ask questions of each other, rather than hurl accusations. Adults can create safe spaces for youth to

share their feelings and concerns while also exploring how they might feel and act if they were in someone else's shoes.

Trusting relationships are essential. 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. The same is true in our broader community and between our citizens and our systems of authority. We function as a nation *only* when we have that shared sense of relationship; helping children identify and develop those relationships is vital. In particular, schools can provide opportunities to strengthen positive interactions with law enforcement, such as engaging properly trained school resource officers as integral members of the school team.

Safety and well-being are a shared responsibility. We each have a role in countering violence, inequity, and isolation. This includes the majority of us who reject these things in our personal lives but have failed to speak up. Adults can help children see this through the lens of bullying prevention. Just as we can't be bystanders when someone is being bullied, we can't be bystanders as citizens when injustice and violence occur. Being silent is not a responsible option. We have to actively counter anger and hate with acceptance and compassion everywhere.

Contributions and effort are recognized and valued. We are all part of the American community and can make positive contributions. While much of the news is focused on anger and violence, there are many more acts of courage, compassion, and kindness. Like adults, children and youth are empowered by the ability to do the right thing and help others. We can and must honestly address systemic problems, but we must also acknowledge the individual citizens of all races and ethnicities, public servants and leaders, and members of law enforcement who go above and beyond to do the right thing every day.

There is no more important endeavor than helping our children and youth become positive, productive, valued citizens. We start by making their safety and well-being an unequivocal priority no matter where they learn, play, and live. In the coming weeks, NASP will be developing resources to help families and schools engage in conversations about prejudice, privilege, and power and how we can work together to counter hate and violence and bring positive change and unity to our country.

For additional information and resources to help support children and youth, visit www.nasponline.org.

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