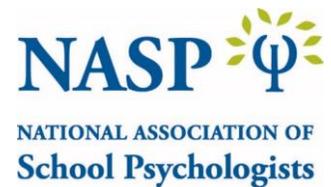


Press Release

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NASP Urges Continued Caution in Media Coverage of School Shootings

Bethesda, MD—The recent school shootings in North Carolina and Colorado are two more tragic examples of the challenge we face as a nation to keep our children, schools, and communities safe from gun violence. While school shootings are statistically rare, even one is unacceptable. There are many complexities to this challenge, including appropriate prevention and preparedness efforts, effective policies and laws, and the capacity for sustained recovery and school community support. Media coverage of these events can have a significant influence on public understanding and perception of these issues. It is imperative that this coverage do no harm.

NASP previously has issued [Guidance on Appropriate Media Coverage of Crisis Events Impacting Children and Youth](#). It has been encouraging to see some media outlets adjusting coverage to honor the victims and avoid undue attention on the perpetrator that might cause contagion (e.g., not mentioning them by name or showing pictures of them; not dwelling on details of their background, behavior, and plans). This is helpful.

We have some concern, though, about the nature and tone of the extensive coverage of and related social media engagement regarding the students who lost their lives by physically engaging with the shooters. Without question, these young people acted selflessly and helped to save lives. They deserve to be honored and remembered. **However, we caution against unintentionally glamourizing the extremely high risk of confronting an armed assailant head on, particularly when it involves youth.** The words and tone used matter and should not mask or minimize the other reasonable choices that might be made in such a situation or the deep and permanent loss involved. It should be reinforced that other options used, like lockdowns, save lives.

Children and adolescents are impressionable and impulsive by nature. They can believe in their own invincibility. The action hero movie and video game mentality where characters can die, then come back to life (or have multiple lives) may distort the thinking and response capabilities of some youth. As a society, we have a need and deep appreciation for real life heroes—such as those in service to our country—that our children feel as well. All children want their parents, families, teachers, and peers to be proud of them. These are powerful contexts within which young people may absorb imagery of “hero students”. Social media provides a visceral and rapid transmitter for magnifying these sensibilities, even when the goal is to show respect and support for victims, their families, and school communities. **We realize that there is a fine line between rightly recognizing the**

actions and celebrating the lives of the victims and unintentionally creating the perception that heroism in and of itself is a goal for our children in these situations. But it is a line to which we must all pay attention.

We must reinforce for students and staff the strategies that have proven most effective.

NASP and the National Association of School Resource Officers developed [Best Practice Considerations for Schools in Active Shooter and Other Armed Assailant Drills](#) to provide school leaders with the various options for conducting such drills. In terms of options-based training, it is important to remember that children's and adolescents' brains and problem-solving abilities are different than those of adults. And adults were the audience for whom "Run, Hide, Fight" and "Avoid, Defend, Deny" active shooter response strategies were developed originally. It is adults' responsibility to ensure that messaging and skill building accounts for these developmental realities, reinforces that adults are in charge of decision-making in crisis situations, and makes clear that the decision to fight or counter an armed assailant should be an absolute last resort that comes with the real risk of dying.

Conveying the basics is important. Regardless of the specific names, all active shooter protocols stress that staying in or getting to a securely locked location is the first priority. In most K–12 schools, staying put in a locked classroom out of the line of sight is by far the safest option for most people and should be the first action. **Lockdown, when implemented appropriately, works and saves lives.**

Clearly, running or escaping to another location may be necessary. As a last resort, if in a room with a shooter where one cannot run, attempting to distract and incapacitate the shooter and then escaping, may be the only option. This is only for self-preservation in a dire life-and-death situation where someone is suddenly face-to-face with a shooter. The goal is to stay alive.

Children should be taught, first and foremost, to follow the directions of the adults in charge. They should know they may be directed by an adult to do one or more of the three options. Adolescents should be taught the options and how to decide quickly which one to use if they don't have an adult in charge. The emphasis should be on staying or getting to a securely locked room as the first choice of action.

Again, confrontation is a last resort. Those who confront a shooter do so at the risk of their lives. It is the responsibility of all adults, including the media, to reinforce for our children and youth that confronting an armed assailant, and potentially being injured or killed as result, is done to stay alive, not because they believe they are expected to be a hero.

Schools and communities affected by gun violence have a long road to recovery. We have a responsibility as a nation to support their efforts, honor the victims, and reinforce appropriate prevention, preparedness, and response strategies for all schools across the country. Responsible media coverage and social media engagement by individuals and organizations is an important part of this process. Careful attention to how we portray the issues, specific events, and the actions and lives of individuals involved is paramount. Our children and youth are depending on it.

Further information is available in NASP's [school crisis preparedness resources](#).

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