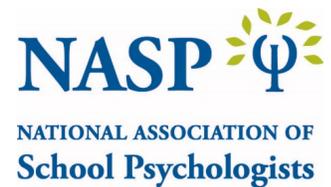


Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NASP Guidance for Ensuring Student Well-Being in the Context of the 2020 Election

Bethesda, MD—The 2020 election has generated strong opinions, emotions, and disagreements among many Americans, and it is occurring in the context of widespread, ongoing stress and anxiety from the pandemic, economic challenges, and racial injustice and unrest. Regardless of the outcome of the election, we have much to do to heal and move forward as a nation. As parents, caregivers, and educators, we have a critical responsibility to help children and youth feel safe and secure and to help them learn how to engage with others of differing viewpoints in a peaceful, tolerant, and respectful manner.

As always, schools play a critical role in this process by creating a positive learning environment for all students, even in a virtual context. It is imperative that educators facilitate respectful discussions among students and safeguard the well-being of those who may feel at risk. Below are some recommendations for how educators and other adults can support children and youth in the days and months ahead.

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, even amidst differing opinions or viewpoints. Maintain culturally and linguistically responsive practices and ensure that students and their families feel connected and engaged. We function as a nation only when we have that shared sense of community; helping children identify and develop those relationships is vital.

Model and teach desired behaviors. We know that adult actions and attitudes influence children and youth. Adults can help children and youth manage their reactions to events in the news and in their communities by understanding their feelings, modeling healthy coping strategies, articulating their viewpoints in a productive way, and closely monitoring their own emotional states and that of those in their care. Identifying and redirecting negative thoughts and feelings not only can help to teach children social-emotional skills and problem solving but can support adults' more positive states of mind as well.

Reassure children that they are and will be okay. Many children and youth are aware of the intensity of this election, and some may feel at risk. This can include those whose preferred candidate did not win and those who feel targeted or marginalized. 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 incidences, and trust that adults will be there to validate and respond to their concerns.

Reinforce staff well-being. Critical to ensuring a safe, supportive school environment is supporting staff well-being and sense of confidence in responding to unfolding events and reactions. School staff are already under tremendous pressure and some may feel overwhelmed. Some may feel at risk themselves depending on the issues emerging from the election. Administrators should provide staff with clear guidelines on how to lead discussions and recognize and respond to student needs. They should also enable staff self-care measures and make clear that staff interactions and behavior must be respectful.

Help children manage strong emotions. For many children, the intense discussions, media images, and messages that they have been exposed to—and in some cases are participating in—during the election can trigger a range of strong emotions. Some children may experience anger or stress. Others may feel a sense of excitement and hope. Children’s emotions can spill over into the classroom, whether in person or virtual. 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 providing coping strategies. This should include knowing the signs of more significant distress and concrete steps for seeking help, such as contacting a school mental health professional.

Reinforce acceptance and appreciation for diversity as critical American values. Racism, systemic inequity, and violence are a major concern for the country and have been a primary issue in this election. Systemically minoritized and marginalized individuals may feel especially at risk in this highly charged climate. 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. **Reiterate that violence is never a solution to fear or anger and will only cause more harm.**

Stop any type of verbal or physical 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 the bullying. School staff should encourage students to continue to be respectful of others.

Help children see other perspectives and value respectful dialogue. Sharing our different points of view and working to find common ground, shared goals, and mutual understanding is the best way to draw strength from our diversity. 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 level accusations. Help students see that words matter, as does how we use them. Teach them to avoid stigmatizing statements and to state their thoughts with opening phrases like, "I believe" or "Have you thought about" instead of "Anybody who" or "No one should."

Discuss the importance of respecting our democratic process. Despite the divisive nature of the election, Americans are voting in large numbers across the country in a largely peaceful manner. Our system of government is based on the peaceful and orderly retention or transfer of power according to the outcome of the election. Highlight how important it is that all citizens engage in the democratic process, not just during a presidential election, but all of the time and at all levels of government. Acknowledge that the process is bolstered by the volunteer efforts of thousands of citizens across the country. Discourage students from seeing the election in terms of winners and losers, if possible, and focus instead on the need to work toward common goals such as reinforcing everyone’s safety and well-being, ensuring equitable and just systems, creating a strong economy, and finding a path to move forward as one country.

Encourage children to channel their views and feelings into positive action. We are all part of the American community and can make positive contributions. 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 that we all have good things in common.

For additional information and resources to help support children and youth, see:

NASP’s COVID-19 Resource Center <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/covid-19-resource-center>

NASP School Safety and Crisis Resource <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis>

NASP Social Justice Resources <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/diversity-and-social-justice/social-justice>

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