



NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION OF
SCHOOL
PSYCHOLOGISTS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CONTACT: Kathy Cowan 301-347-1665

Bethesda, MD—On behalf of our 25,000 members, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) joins the nation in expressing our sadness and shock at the horrific events at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT today. Our thoughts and prayers go out to everyone affected by this heartbreaking tragedy.

It is important to keep in mind that an event like this is rare. Schools are one of the safest places for children and youth during the school day, and an important place for them to receive support and return to normalcy. Communication and collaboration among schools, parents, and communities is critical to ensure that our students continue to view schools as safe, caring, and supportive environments. Further, how adults react to this tragedy can shape the way children and youth react and their perceptions of safety.

Educators can reinforce students' sense of safety by making classrooms predictable and welcoming, providing access to mental health supports as needed, and connecting families with other available resources after school hours. Families are encouraged to spend time together, validate children's feelings, ask for help as needed, and find calm and relaxing activities to do at home. It is very important to limit children's exposure to media coverage, particularly for young children. If children are watching the news or accessing information online, parents and caregivers should be available to talk to their children about it.

Families and educators will serve on the frontline of helping children understand and cope with this violence and loss of life. Most children and youth are resilient and will cope well with the support and caring of their families, teachers, friends, and other caring adults. However, young children may have particular difficulty understanding and describing their feelings and emotions. Some tips to help children deal with the aftermath of today's school shooting include:

- Provide a developmentally appropriate, clear, and straightforward explanation of the event.
- Return to normalcy and routine to the best extent possible while maintaining flexibility
- Let children know it's okay to feel upset or angry
- Be a good listener and observer
- Provide various ways for children to express emotion, either through journaling, writing letters, talking, making a collage, or music
- Focus on resiliency as well as the compassion of others

This is an extremely important time to reinforce children's natural resilience and emphasize the preventive steps that schools can take to maintain a safe and caring school environment.

Among those who lost their life today was Mary Sherlach, Sandy Hook ES school psychologist and a NASP member. Like all school psychologists, Mary cared deeply about her students and was committed to their personal well-being and success in school, at home, and throughout life. The thoughts and prayers of the school psychology family are with Mary's family and circle of friends, as well as the students she served so well.

For additional information on school safety and crisis response, and the role of school psychologists in supporting academic and life success of our nation's youth, visit www.nasponline.org or contact NASP Director of Communications, Kathy Cowan at kcowan@naspweb.org.

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