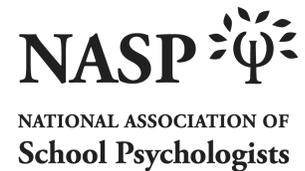


Preventing Mass Violence Requires Access to Mental Health Services and Reduced Inappropriate Access to Firearms



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Bethesda, MD—The National Association of School Psychologist (NASP) joins the nation in shock and grief over the shooting in Parkland, Florida. Incidents of mass violence like this are far too common, and we need to do more as a nation to address the underlying causes. This includes addressing our broken mental health system and examining our existing—and the potential for more effective—gun legislation.

As the nation looks to understand and respond effectively to this tragedy, it is imperative that we stay focused on facts and what we know works to prevent violence and keep our children and youth safe. Particularly important to understand is that the majority of people with mental illness are not violent. There have been frequent reports in the news that the perpetrator had a troubled past, was in treatment for mental health concerns, and that this may have been related to his homicidal behavior. To conclude that the presence of an issue like depression predisposes someone to commit this type of violence perpetuates an incorrect stereotype and maintains a stigma that often creates a reluctance to seek treatment.

Homicidal behaviors are the result of a complex combination and interaction of risk factors that may be environmental, biological, or both. In most cases, the presence of a diagnosable mental illness alone does not predispose someone to extreme or calculated violence. Implying so risks undermining the important efforts to reduce stigma around mental health problems and disabilities, and may discourage individuals and families from seeking appropriate treatment. With appropriate treatment, especially early intervention, people who experience adverse childhood experiences or struggle with mental health issues can lead rich, full, and productive lives. Violence, as seen this week, is related to an interaction of risk factors.

A known risk factor for homicidal and suicidal behavior is access to weapons—such as high powered firearms—which we know is highly associated with increased risk of injury and death among youth. We need effective laws and policies that keep guns out of the hands of those who would hurt themselves or others, limit access to weapons intended to cause mass destruction in a short amount of time, and ensure that the only armed persons at schools are highly trained professionals, such as school resource officers.

Schools play a critical and irreplaceable role in keeping students safe and supporting mental health. In circumstances like the Florida tragedy, we need to continue to take steps to interrupt an individual's pathway toward violence. Providing ongoing access to mental health services promotes school safety by helping students feel connected to their school community. This connection is critical in helping to identify students who may need more intensive services or who require

immediate law enforcement intervention when the potential for violence is identified. In these cases, collaboration among school staff members, community members, students, and their families is essential to ensuring that children receive care and effective interventions. Improved access to mental health services in schools and continued relationship building are critical factors in preventing and responding to both violent acts directed at schools and the necessary school crisis response following exposure to trauma.

Our nation must engage in a serious discussion about how we can improve our efforts to provide for the mental health needs of our children and youth; not just to prevent horrific acts of violence, but to support their well-being, academic achievement, and success in life. Speculating or circulating misinformation can be harmful and distracting to the mission of providing a safe school environment for our children. Simultaneously, we must also have a serious discussion that leads to real action to reduce in appropriate access to firearms and their potential use against our nation's children and schools as vulnerable targets.

For additional information, visit www.nasponline.org or contact NASP Director of Communications, Kathy Cowan at kcowan@naspweb.org.

Resources Related to School Crisis and Violence Prevention

[Framework for Safe and Successful Schools \(www.nasponline.org/schoolsafetyframework\)](http://www.nasponline.org/schoolsafetyframework)

[PREPaRE Training Curriculum \(www.nasponline.org/prepare\)](http://www.nasponline.org/prepare)

[NASP Resolution on Efforts to Prevent Gun Violence \(www.nasponline.org/nasp-resolution-prevent-gun-violence\)](http://www.nasponline.org/nasp-resolution-prevent-gun-violence)