

# School Safety and Crisis

## Countering Coronavirus Stigma and Racism Tips for Teachers and Other Educators

Since the first cases of coronavirus (COVID-19) were identified in China, individuals of Chinese and Asian descent have been experiencing “coronavirus racism,” which includes anti-Chinese and anti-Asian scapegoating for the spread of COVID-19 and other xenophobic reactions including fear, exclusion, microaggressions, and other racist behaviors related to this public health epidemic. Both children and adults have been targets of verbal harassment, avoidance, and exclusion. Bullying and harassment are *never* acceptable, but they can be especially damaging when certain students or segments of society feel especially vulnerable. School personnel need to be prepared to prevent and to intervene quickly and effectively in the presence of abusive behaviors toward *any* students. **Indeed, schools have a legal and ethical responsibility to uphold all students’ civil rights, which includes preventing all forms of bullying, harassment, and racist intimidation or behavior.**

**COVID-19 does not recognize race, nationality, or ethnicity.** Individuals of Chinese ancestry, or of any other Asian nationality, are not more vulnerable to this illness. Accurate information is essential to allaying anxiety about COVID-19 and ensuring that Asian communities are not unfairly targeted or stigmatized.

### TIPS FOR TEACHERS AND OTHER EDUCATORS

1. ***Stop stigma by sharing accurate information and countering misinformation.*** Being of Asian descent does not increase the chance of getting or spreading COVID-19. Children should be provided with factual, age appropriate information about how to avoid infections and the spread of disease. Teaching children positive preventive measures, talking with them about their fears, and giving them a sense of some control over their risk of infection can help reduce anxiety.
2. ***Avoid stereotyping people or countries.*** Children can easily generalize negative statements to students in their classes and community. Appearing suspicious of individuals of Asian descent and making inappropriate comments and innuendo about Asian communities can create a stressful and unsafe learning environment for innocent groups of people. Be clear about your statements and biases, and help children understand their own prejudices.
3. ***Speak up if you hear, see, or read discriminatory comments made by students or staff.*** Educators must interrupt bias by speaking up against every biased remark every time it happens. Inconsistent responding sends the message that coronavirus stigma and racism are acceptable in some circumstances. Additionally, educators should explain why the behavior or statement was offensive and how it may be interpreted by others.
4. ***Counter microaggressions with micro-affirmations.*** Microaffirmations are subtle acknowledgements to help individuals feel valued and included. These include acknowledging that a microaggression may have occurred, supporting individuals when they tell you they have been targeted because of their Chinese or Asian heritage, and visibly confronting inequitable, hostile, or biased behavior.
5. ***Model compassion and acceptance of differences.*** Children take their emotional cues from the significant adults in their lives. Avoid making negative statements about any racial, ethnic, or religious group. Reach out to your neighbors and colleagues who might feel at risk because of their ethnicity, religion, or other traits.
6. ***Provide useful information to students, families, and staff.*** Accurate information about people, events, reactions, and feelings is empowering. Use language that is developmentally appropriate for children. Make sure

all information is factually true. This is especially important when news reports have negative statements about any specific group.

7. **Stop any type of harassment or bullying immediately.** Make it clear that such behavior, in any form (in person, online, social media) is unacceptable. Talk to the children involved about the reasons for their behavior. Offer alternative methods of expressing their anger, confusion, or insecurity.
8. **Empower students to seek help.** Teachers should encourage students (victim and bystanders) to tell a trusted adult or speak out against bullying, harassment, or microaggressions (if they feel safe doing so).
9. **Ensure that staff are respected and protected as well.** Students may not be the only individuals at risk of experiencing overt bias or microaggressions from peers or students. Make sure staff know their rights, what an appropriate response may be in the face of such behavior, and how to communicate a concern to school leaders.
10. **Explore children's fears.** Even children who can describe what happened may not be able to express fears, form questions, or describe assumptions or conclusions they may have made. Use activities, role-playing, and discussions to explore their fears about the events and their feelings about various groups from diverse cultures or lifestyles.
11. **Emphasize positive, familiar images of diverse groups.** Identify people of diverse ethnicities, religions, and/or lifestyles that children know and who have a positive place in their lives. These could be neighbors, friends, school personnel, healthcare professionals, members of their faith community, or local merchants. Discuss the many characteristics, values, and experiences the children have in common with these people.
12. **Identify "heroes" of varying backgrounds involved in response to crisis events.** These include firefighters, police officers, rescue workers, military personnel, public officials, medical workers, teachers, faith leaders, public figures, and regular citizens who work to help keep students, families, schools, and communities safe.
13. **Undertake projects to help those in need with people from diverse backgrounds.** Helping others is part of the healing process. 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 their sense of commonality with diverse people.
14. **Discuss historical instances of American prejudice.** Internment of Japanese Americans after Pearl Harbor and the backlash against Arab Americans during the Gulf War are obvious examples. Teachers can do lessons in class, but parents can also discuss the consequences of these events and encourage their children to suggest better choices that Americans can make this time.

## REMIND STUDENTS AND STAFF

***Racism and bias have no place in our school or community under any circumstance and are not a solution to our fears.*** The goal when faced with a potential health emergency like COVID-19 is to focus the steps we can take to reduce spread of the virus, not to cause further, unfounded harm. Lashing out at innocent people around us, or hating them because of their origins, their appearance, their ethnicity, or their choice of dress will not help reduce risk from the virus and will only cause unnecessary harm.

***All people deserve to be treated with fairness, respect, and dignity.*** America is strong because of its diversity. American democracy is founded on respect for individual differences. Those differences in culture, religion, ideas, ethnicity, and other forms of identity have contributed to the strength and richness of our country.

***We are in this together.*** People of all ethnicities are affected when an emergency event impacts a community. We need to support each other, comfort each other, and work together during difficult times.

## RELATED RESOURCES

- Countering Coronavirus Stigma and Racism: Tips for Parents and Caregivers, [http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/countering-covid-19-\(coronavirus\)-stigma-and-racism-tips-for-parents-and-caregivers](http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/health-crisis-resources/countering-covid-19-(coronavirus)-stigma-and-racism-tips-for-parents-and-caregivers)
- U.S. Department of Education OCR Coronavirus Statement, <https://content.govdelivery.com/accounts/USED/bulletins/27f5130>

## Countering Coronavirus Stigma and Racism: Tips for Teachers and Other Educators

- American Civil Liberties Union, <https://www.aclu.org/>
- Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council, <http://www.asianpacificpolicyandplanningcouncil.org/>
- Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations, <https://www.aapcho.org/>
- Korean American Coalition – Los Angeles, <https://www.kacla.org/>
- National Association of Asian American Professionals, <https://www.naaap.org/>
- Southern Poverty Law Center, <https://www.splcenter.org/>
- Teaching Tolerance, <https://www.tolerance.org/>

*This handout is partly adapted from Promoting Compassion and Acceptance in Crisis by the National Association of School Psychologists, 2015 (<https://www.nasponline.org/promoting-compassion-and-acceptance-in-crisis>). Copyright 2015 by the National Association of School Psychologists. Contributors: Celeste Malone, Christina Conolly, Lisa Coffey, Tiffany Lee, Cixin Wang, and Danielle Guttman-Lapin.*

*For additional information related to COVID-19, see <https://www.nasponline.org/healthcrisisresources>.*

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