

PARIS TERRORIST ATTACKS

Wednesday, November 18, 2015

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 acts of terrorism in Paris, France. Our thoughts go out to the French people and to everyone affected by this heartbreaking tragedy.

Intentional acts of violence that hurt innocent people are frightening and upsetting, particularly when they are accompanied by explicit threats of further harm. Modern media can make international events feel relevant and potentially threatening to children and youth here. They will look to adults for models of how to react, and to help them understand the event. Families and school personnel can support children by establishing a sense of safety and security, helping children to process their thoughts and feelings, and placing the event in the proper context. Additional tips include:

- Provide accurate reassurances regarding the possibility of terrorism in their community.
- Return to normalcy and routine to the extent possible while maintaining flexibility.
- Let children know it's okay to have many different feelings and there is no one right way to respond.
- Be a good listener and observer
- Monitor and limit exposure to media, including social media and other Internet sites
- Provide ways for children to express emotion, such as journaling, writing letters, talking, art, or music
- Focus on resiliency as well as the compassion of others
- Identify the various ways in which people are helping; emphasize the ability to do good

A natural reaction to acts of extreme violence is the desire to lash out and punish the perpetrators or perceived enemy. People who are angry or frightened often feel the ability to “fight back” puts them more in control or will alleviate their sense of outrage. While anger is a normal response, we should not compound an already tragic situation and react against innocent individuals with vengeance and harassment. There is a tremendous risk of unfairly stigmatizing people who are perceived to resemble the perpetrators because of their race, language, religion, or the way they dress.

Children, in particular, may have difficulty channeling their feelings appropriately and they can easily pick up negative or demeaning cues given by adults around them. Given the diversity of America's schools, some students may become targets of hostility and blame. Bullying and harassment are *never* acceptable but they can be particularly damaging when certain students or segments of society feel especially vulnerable. Families and school personnel need to be prepared to prevent and to intervene quickly and effectively in the presence of abusive behaviors toward *any* students. Such behaviors can only further contribute to the risk of violence in schools and communities.

Adults can help children understand the importance of treating all people with dignity and not judging entire *groups* of people for the actions of a few. ***Most importantly, adults must model compassion and acceptance of differences in their words and behavior.*** They can encourage children to explore their feelings about prejudice and hate. Doing so is not only critical to preventing further harm, but the process presents a potentially powerful opportunity for our youth to learn and to incorporate into their values the true strength of our country—our commitment to individual freedom and upholding the respect and dignity of all people.

For additional information on helping children cope and promoting compassion, peace and acceptance of differences, visit www.nasponline.org.