

SAFE SCHOOLS

NEWSLETTER



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Safe Schools NEWS

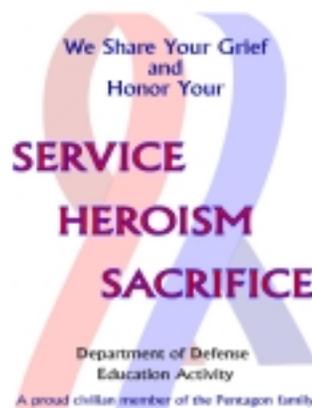
Educational & National Leaders Respond to the September 11, 2001 Attacks

"There has never been a time in our modern history that it was more important for principals, teachers, students, and their communities to work together to heal their wounds and try to build a better world."

*Vincent Ferrandino, Executive Director
National Association of Elementary School Principals
September 12, 2001*

"What we are attempting to do is to assure that we can prevent people from adversely affecting our way of life...Children have to go off to school, and we have to have reasonable expectation that they'll be coming home from school."

*Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld
September 24, 2001 DoD News Conference*



The original copy of this poster was placed among the many other messages of condolence and unity that now form a remembrance site on a hill overlooking the Pentagon.





Laura Bush Letter to Elementary School Students

On September 12, 2001, Laura Bush wrote a letter to elementary school students reassuring them about their feelings in response to the terrorist incidents (www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/letter2.html). Ms. Bush empathizes with young students in words they can understand:



White House photo by Paul Morse

“Many Americans were injured or lost their lives in the recent national tragedy. All their friends and loved ones are feeling very sad, and you may be feeling sad, frightened or confused, too.”

School administrators reassuring young students can use Ms. Bush’s words as an example.

“I want to reassure you that many people — including your family, your teachers, and your school counselor — love and care about you and are looking out for your safety. You can talk with them and ask them questions. You can also write down your thoughts or draw a picture that shows how you are feeling and share that with the adults in your life.”

In a separate letter to middle and high school students (www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/letter1.html), Ms. Bush reminded youth that the terrorist incidents provide an opportunity to learn resilience and offer assistance.

“With each story of sorrow and pain comes one of hope and courage. As we move forward all of us have an opportunity to become better people and to learn valuable lessons about heroism, love and compassion.”

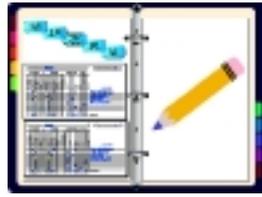
Secretary Paige Writes to School Administrators

Secretary of Education Rod Paige encouraged school administrators and teachers to use the terrorist incidents as an opportunity to teach tolerance for diversity in his September 19, 2001 letter (www.ed.gov/PressReleases/09-2001/09192001c.html).



“Encourage students to discuss diversity constructively and to express disagreement over ideas or beliefs in a respectful manner. Have a system in place to intervene if particular students exhibit feelings or conduct that could endanger others. Encourage all students to report threats of racial or ethnic harassment.”





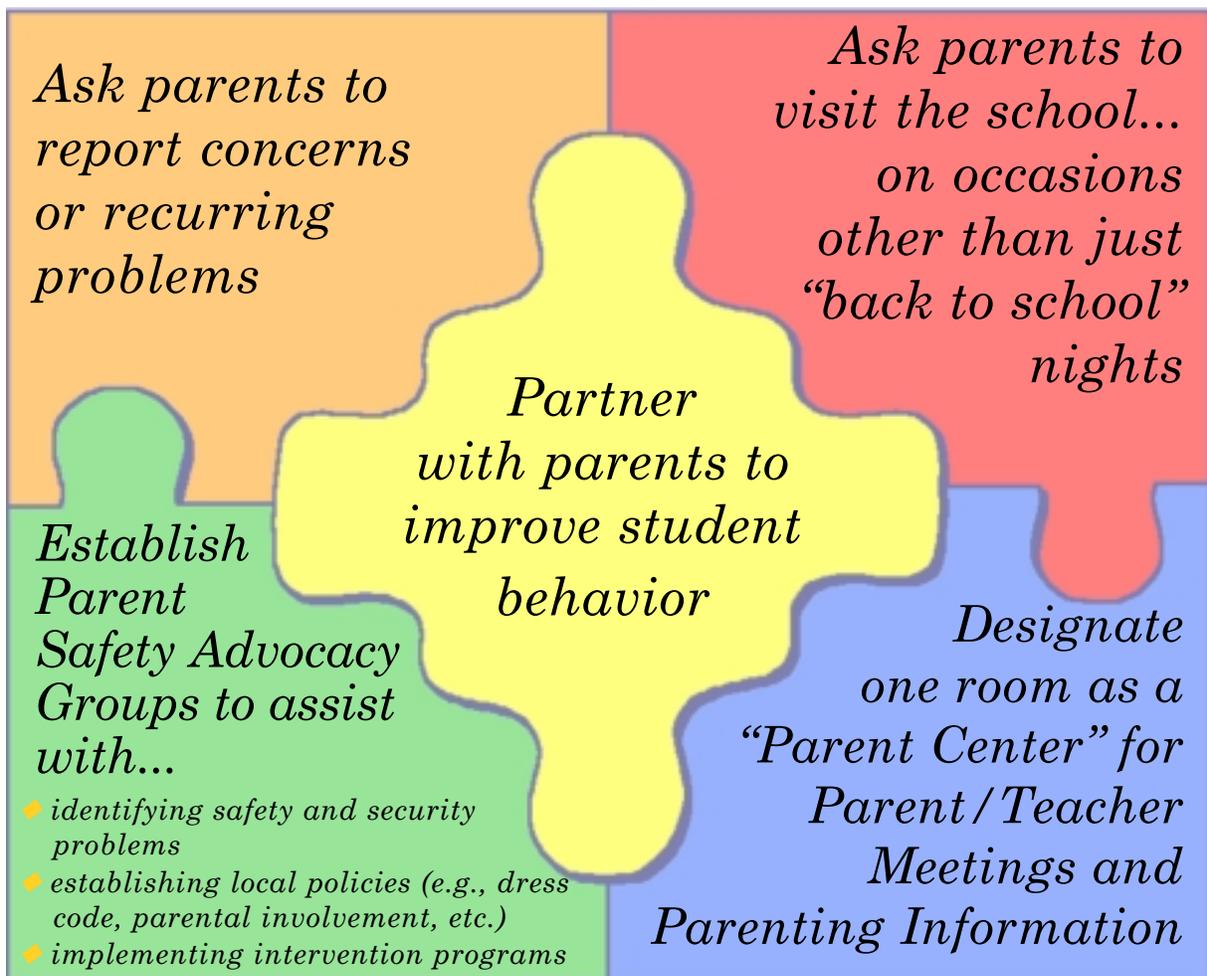
Safe School Planning

Parents Can Help

Developing a Safe School Plan takes time and effort: data gathering, analysis and evaluation, selection of possible solutions, and implementing a Plan scheme. Meanwhile, demands on principals' time are so intense that they cannot possibly develop a Safe Schools Plan without help.

Help is all around! Establish a Safe Schools Committee with members from staff, parents, students, safety and security officers, and the post community (i.e., provost marshal, recreation services, etc.). A Safe Schools Committee will help the process by achieving consensus or "buy in," assisting in the planning process, and implementing the Plan. How can a principal integrate community members into a committee? Let's focus on just the parents. Parents are a great resource and can be an effective part of the Committee.

Parents are partners, not obstacles. Make parents feel their involvement is wanted and not meddlesome. Advertise volunteer opportunities in many places, including newsletters, churches, and public bulletin boards. Consider the following ideas for fostering parental involvement in the effort to conduct more effective safe school planning.



Helping Students Cope With Terrorist Incidents:

“Families and teachers alike should know that they play a central role in helping children to understand what has taken place, to separate fact from fiction and to establish a sense of safety.... Watch for signs of unusual behavior and take steps to limit exposure to television and Internet imagery.”

*Secretary of Education Rod Paige, September 14, 2001
(www.ed.gov/PressReleases/09-2001/09142001.html)*

The terrorist incidents at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon might affect children by causing nightmares or regressive behavior. Several mental health, emergency response, and educational organizations offer suggestions parents, teachers, and school administrators can use to reassure children.

Elementary School

“Play therapy and art therapy can also help younger children to remember the traumatic event safely and express their feelings about it.”

*National Institute for Mental Health Fact Sheet
“Helping Children and Adolescents Cope With Violence and Disasters”
(www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/violence.cfm)*

School Administrator & Teacher Actions:

- ➔ Reassure children that their fears and concerns are normal responses. Fears usually include:
 - It might happen again
 - Loved ones might be hurt
 - Child might be left alone
- ➔ Respect preferences of children who do not want to participate in discussions. Mentioning the incident repeatedly or forcing discussion could further traumatize children.

Teaching Opportunity:

- ➔ Help children learn words to express their feelings.
- ➔ Explain that it is sometimes okay to be upset or disturbed.

The Sesame Street Workshop (www.sesameworkshop.org) recommends limiting young children’s exposure to news and offers specific questions and answers for adults to use with children. The workshop encourages children to participate in creative activities such as writing a song or drawing a picture that promotes tolerance.

The National Institute for Mental Health (NIMH) fact sheet “Helping Children and Adolescents Cope with Violence and Disasters” (www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/violence.cfm) describes how educators can help young children cope with the psychological stress caused by viewing reports of the terrorist attacks. NIMH reports that if given understanding and an opportunity to communicate their feelings through expression, children usually recover from the fear and anxiety of a traumatic experience within a few weeks. However, NIMH suggests referring children to mental health counseling who continue to show signs of psychological trauma such as “reexperiencing” the event or “avoiding reminders” of the incident.



Middle School

The Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS) cautions that twelve to fourteen year-olds might complain of physical symptoms and refuse to do school work (www.mentalhealth.org/schoolviolence/parents.htm). CMHS notes that these students could respond to the incidents with high-risk behaviors such as experimenting with drugs and alcohol.

School Administrator & Teacher Actions:

- Ask questions to learn what students know about the incidents.
- Have students write “What other students think about the attacks” to help them express their feelings.
- Discuss the event with children. Reassure students that their fears are normal responses.
- Remind students they are safe. Discuss news reports of heightened security in the community.
- Reestablish normal daily routines to provide stability.
- Let students plan family and classroom activities to regain a sense of control.

Teaching Opportunities:

- Teach coping and problem-solving skills for managing anxiety that are appropriate for the students’ maturity (i.e., emotion management, converting anger to constructive action).
- Encourage tolerance of diversity.
- Collect news reports of people aiding victims to help students consider how they can respond to the incident with victim assistance or community service.
- Counter feelings of loss of control with literature and social studies lessons about individuals persevering in adversity or working together during crises.

“Children need to be empowered to do something. They see big nations making huge decisions . . . we need to have them think ‘How can I bring peace to my life, my home, my community?’”

*Helen Evans, Principal
Etobicoke’s Hollycrest Middle School
Toronto, Canada
(9/17/01 Toronto Star)*



High School

High School students respond to terrorist incidents much like adults. They experience survivors' guilt and want to help victims. Sometimes youth feel frustrated that they cannot fulfill adult responsibilities as the community responds to a disaster. One high school student, frustrated that she was too young to give blood, started car washes to fund Red Cross victim assistance efforts. Other schools participated and provided thousands of dollars in donations.

School Administrator & Teacher Actions:

- ➔ Encourage youth to discuss their feelings with a teacher, counselor, or church leader.
- ➔ Remind students that as the painful feelings diminish with time, they will realize that learning to cope with tragedy makes them stronger, more adaptable and self-reliant.
- ➔ Plan a parent meeting to coordinate responses for troubled youth.

Teaching Opportunities:

- ➔ Help students plan constructive responses to the incidents. Consider artwork, writing, or entrepreneurial responses.
- ➔ DoDEA students could include efforts to provide assistance to survivors or demonstrate patriotism in their service learning projects.

The CMHS fact sheet “After Disaster: What Teens Can Do” (www.mentalhealth.org/schoolviolence/teens.htm) reassures adolescents that “whether or not you were directly affected by a disaster or violent event, it is normal to feel anxious about your own safety, to picture the event in your own mind, and to wonder how you would react in an emergency.”

Sources of Further Information:

U.S. Department of Education “Suggestions for Adults: Talking and Thinking with Children About the Terrorist Attacks” (www.ed.gov/inits/september11/adults.html).

The American Red Cross and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Suggestions to help *parents* reassure children (www.fema.gov/nwz01/nwz01_99.htm).

National Association of School Psychologists “Coping With a National Tragedy” guidelines for school personnel and parents (www.nasponline.org/NEAT/crisis_0911.html).

American School Counselors Association “Terrorism response: Tips for Teachers and Parents” and “Coping Strategies for Children and Young Adults” (www.schoolcounselor.org)

George Mason University “Psychological First Aid Kit for School Professionals” (www.gmu.edu/departments/psychology/homepage/PsychFirstAidKit). Includes actions for school administrators and guides for teachers leading class discussions.

American Counseling Association “Crisis Fact Sheet: Helping Children Cope with Trauma” (www.counseling.org/consumers_media/facts_childtrauma.htm)



IT'S TIME TO PUT OUR FOOT DOWN

Submitted by:
Paul W. Hersey
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National Institute for Safe Schools

My dad had a saying when our adolescent behavior reached an unacceptable level: “It’s time to put our foot down!” And he did!

My reaction to the behavior of pre-school and elementary youth in public and even at home today is, “**IT IS TIME TO PUT OUR FOOT DOWN**”.

Maryland elementary principal Fran Donaldson recently told the Washington Post, “Ten percent of my children cause trouble now compared with just 2% in my early days of school work.” Elementary suspensions in her district rocketed from 72 in 1994 to 362 in 1999. Recently, Donaldson had one child spit on her, another kick her, yet another trip her, and an eight-year-old threaten to burn down her school.

Research correlates adult crime with a child’s elementary school infractions. So why aren’t we stopping unacceptable behavior early? The current focus on creating and maintaining safe learning environments in middle and high schools should begin with *careful monitoring* of elementary school behavior. *All* of us responsible for teaching and giving positive direction to our youth must **PUT OUR FOOT DOWN**.

Youth desperately want fairness. The problem, kids say, is that rules and guidelines for playing fair, being honest, and helping one another are often contradictory or “fussified”. Few adults model appropriate behavior for our youth.

Too many children observe inappropriate language, lack of consideration for others, and too much emphasis on being Number One — and precious little commitment to the dignity of and respect for others.

“So whose job is it to teach these important values to our young people? Who should assist our most precious natural resource — our children, in learning how to establish and live within a civil, kind, and respectful home, school, and work atmosphere?”

The **responsibility** for developing a positive and nurturing climate for our boys and girls is a **partnership** of parents, school administrators, board members, teachers, bus drivers, all school employees, church personnel, business leaders, politicians, sports figures — everyone who directly or indirectly influences our young people. This alliance of concerned parents and citizens must commit to **teaching** the right climate for learning and growing up, and **modeling** positive behaviors for our youth to appreciate and emulate.

Whether through character education classes, providing anti-bullying programs in schools, sponsoring neighborhood ethics seminars for the general public, or *any* other approach, schools *can* emphasize the importance of establishing appropriate rules of conduct. Let’s bring civility, dignity, caring, and respect for individuals back to our classroom and home.

Let’s not miss this opportunity to **PUT OUR FOOT DOWN** for our leaders of tomorrow...our young people should expect no less of us.

Mr. Hersey is a former teacher, principal, and Director of the NASSP National Assessment Center that teaches leadership strategies to principals.

