



**NATIONAL  
ASSOCIATION OF  
SCHOOL  
PSYCHOLOGISTS**

# Promoting Tolerance and Peace

## Tips for Parents and Schools

A natural reaction to violent anger or feeling under attack is outrage and the desire to “fight back”. Sometimes this constitutes genuine self-defense. If misdirected, however, such outrage can do serious harm. This is particularly true in times of turmoil when we risk compounding an already difficult situation by reacting against innocent individuals with vengeance and intolerance based race, language, religion, or the way they dress.

Young people exposed to images of violence may have difficulty channeling their feelings appropriately. They can easily pick up negative or demeaning cues given by adults around them. Classmates and peers may become targets of hostility and blame for something with which they had nothing to do.

Adults can help children and youth understand the importance of treating all people with dignity and not judging *groups* of people for the actions of a few. Modeling tolerance and compassion and helping children examine their feelings about prejudice and hate are critical. Doing so not only helps prevent harm, the process also presents a potentially powerful opportunity for our young people to learn and incorporate into their values the true strength of our country—our commitment to individual freedom and upholding the respect and dignity of all people.

### **Messages for Children and Youth**

1. ***Violence and hate are never solutions to anger.*** Perpetrators of violence—against fellow students or against our country—cause tremendous harm because they act violently against innocent people out of blind hate. We must not act like them by lashing out at innocent people around us, or “hating” them because of their origins, their faith, their appearance, or their choice of dress.
2. ***Groups of people should not be judged by the actions of a few.*** It is wrong to condemn an entire group of people by association of religion, race, homeland, affiliations or even proximity. No one likes to be blamed or threatened for the actions of others.
3. ***America is strong because of our diversity.*** Known as the great “melting-pot” of the world, American democracy is founded on respect for individual differences. Those differences in culture, religion, ideas, ethnicity and lifestyle have contributed to the strength and richness of our country.

4. ***All people deserve to be treated with fairness, respect and dignity.*** Certainly individuals that are proven to be guilty of a crime should be punished. No matter how angry we are over these terrible crimes, our Constitution ensures fair and equitable treatment under the law for all Americans.
5. ***Vengeance and justice are not the same.*** Justice means punishing the real perpetrators, not innocent people. Hurting other children and neighbors will not make us safer, stop terrorists, or help punish students who harm or harass classmates. It will only add to the hate and anger, increasing the risk of further violence.
6. ***We are in this together.*** People of all ethnicities are hurt by terrorism and other acts of senseless violence. We need to support each other, comfort each other, and work together to help those most in need during difficult times.
7. ***History shows us that intolerance only causes harm.*** Some of our country's darkest moments resulted from prejudice and intolerance for our own people because individuals acted out of fear. We must not repeat terrible mistakes such as our inappropriate, often violent treatment and ignorance of minority groups.
8. ***We need to work for peace in our communities and around the world.*** By reaching out to our classmates, friends, and neighbors from diverse backgrounds, we can help heal the wounds from tragic events and build stronger, more resilient communities.
9. ***Tolerance is a lifelong endeavor.*** Although it is critical today to protect our classmates and neighbors from harassment, the issues of tolerance and inclusion go beyond this period in our national life together. We must embrace these values towards all Americans for all time. This includes all races, religions, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and those with special needs.

## **Tips for Parents and Teachers**

1. ***Model tolerance and compassion.*** 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.
2. ***Provide useful information.*** Accurate information about people, events, reactions, and feelings is empowering. Use language that is developmentally appropriate for children. Make sure that all information is factually true. This is especially important when news reports have negative statements about any specific group.
3. ***Avoid stereotyping people or countries.*** Children can easily generalize negative statements to students in their classes and community. Focusing on the nationality of terrorists or the affiliations or appearance of other perpetrators of violence can create prejudice, anger, and mistrust for innocent groups of people. Be clear about your statements and biases, and help children understand their own prejudices.

4. ***Stop any type of harassment or bullying immediately.*** Make it clear that such behavior is unacceptable. Talk to the children involved about the reasons for their behavior. Offer alternative methods of expressing their anger, confusion, or insecurity.
5. ***Address the issue of blame factually.*** Discuss who and what may be to blame for the event(s), using non-speculative terms. Do not repeat the speculations of others, including newscasters. Do not encourage or allow random blaming. Understand that self-blame may be a way for some students to feel "in control" (something different they "could have done" or "could do" in the future). Be careful to ensure students from potentially targeted groups do not assume blame in order to make classmates feel better. Explain that the actions of a few individuals should not be blamed on a racial or ethnic group as a whole. Help children and youth to resist the tendency to "pin the blame" on someone close by. In the United States, we believe that all people are innocent until solid, reliable evidence from our legal authorities proves otherwise.
6. ***Discuss how it would feel to be blamed unfairly by association.*** Ask children if they have ever gotten in trouble for something a sibling or friend did and how they felt. Would they like it if their entire class were punished for the actions of one student and if they think this would be fair? Older children might want to consider what would have happened if all white American males had been condemned for the Oklahoma City bombing.
7. ***Explore children's fears.*** Even children who can describe what happened or is happening may not be able to express fears, 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.
8. ***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, health care professionals, members of their faith community, or local merchants. Discuss the many characteristics, values, and experiences the children have in common with these people.
9. ***Identify "heroes" of varying backgrounds involved in response to traumatic 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.
10. ***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.
11. ***Discuss historical instances of American intolerance.*** 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.

12. ***Learn about the diverse communities and faiths represented in your area.***

Knowledge debunks myths about other people and can humanize other cultures. In school, have children share information about their family or cultural customs to reinforce the notion that all people have special beliefs and rituals.

13. ***Read books with your children or students that address prejudice, tolerance, and hate.*** There are many, many stories appropriate for varying age groups that can help children think about and define their feelings regarding these issues. The school or local librarian can make recommendations.

### **Additional Tips for Schools**

1. ***Provide parents with information.*** Send home materials on class lessons, book titles, resources for further information, and opportunities to help. Enlist support from parents to prevent "teasing, bullying or abuse" of *any* students. Consider implementation of one of the proven bullying prevention curricula, such as "Bullyproof Your School."
2. ***Train all school personnel.*** Every school professional should be trained to model tolerance and intervene immediately if a child is being bullied. This includes bus drivers, lunchroom and playground monitors, after school program leaders, coaches and extracurricular activities directors.
3. ***Share information with community groups.*** Provide talking points, information, and intervention strategies to local community organizations dealing with children. This can include local libraries, youth programs, recreational facilities, and the media.

For further information on promoting tolerance among children and youth, contact NASP at (301) 657-0270 or visit NASP's website at [www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org).

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