

In Response to the Unfolding of Current Events in the US

The younger the child, the less apt they are to understand the gravity of the situation. We also know that children react to how they think their caregivers are doing. Thus, it is very important that we provide staff support. The kids will only do as well as the staff are doing.

Give allowances for people to make personal calls, check up on their own kids, keep much more in touch with family or others about whom they are worried.

Things will likely remain very quiet while we all wait and watch what it is this will come to mean.

What Schools Can Do

First, be prepared for bomb threats -- they commonly skyrocket after events such as these. Try not to raise the anxiety level of students, but implement all appropriate procedures if threats occur.

Involve your risk management/safety and security offices in looking at possible turns of events -- we always do better if something is not a surprise or if we've considered the possibility before. Think also in terms of transportation issues and alternatives to solutions that you currently have -- expand your thinking.

Look at several levels of response:

- How to work with students
- How to support staff
- How to support parents

How to support students:

Remember, students will be shaken in direct proportion to how adults are coping.

Remain calm, give messages of reassurance. Especially, if students are frightened, remind them that you won't leave them alone.

Keep your schedule as much as possible. Suspend academics as much as appropriate so students can talk about what has happened, but don't let go of routine if you don't have to.

Look for how you can teach lessons by "bringing this home" -- the lesson here is that hate, distrust, lack of tolerance is damaging at any level. It is very easy at times such as these to focus on blame, on making certain other groups are the "bad guys" and make us out to be "the good guys." Anything that reinforces stereotypes is a lesson missed and an opportunity wasted.



Help students put words to how this is for them. Ask questions more than giving advice or answers, except for answers about how much you are going to support them, how much you are going to be there for them.

Give clear messages that there is no tolerance for students making fun of this event, of those who have died, or any other aspect. Let students know that you expect all of them to be respectful in all ways about this event.

"These kinds of events are frightening for all of us, but these are also times when we draw together and are kinder, take better care of each other, spend more time together."

"Sometimes it takes awhile for us to understand all of what happened. The waiting is a really difficult part."

"There are lots and lots of people who know what to do to respond, and terrific efforts are mobilized. People will come to help New York from all over America, and even from other countries."

"What are some things we can do to show our compassion?" Help kids organize something, or organize a mini-memorial place where students can put flowers or other gestures.

Consider doing local things. Older students and staff may be able to donate blood.

Draw kids close -- be there for them in the most basic nurturing ways.

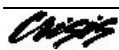
Stay away from whipping up any additional drama. Don't focus on which terrorists are responsible. The media will let us know that soon enough.

Take the focus off the event and help students identify what the school can do to help them feel safe. In other words, bring the focus close to home.

Strengthen your watchfulness in measures for prevention of suicide. Pay extra attention to kids or adults you know are at risk. Take time to have extra awareness and connection with all people in your life.

Support those who will be impacted in horrible ways, such as those who have any family member who works in the airline industry, diplomatic posts, everyone in the military, people who are in emergency services, people who are in federal service whose buildings are now under different levels of security, people who have lost a family member in a plane crash, and many other groups. There will be categories of workers and categories of sufferers or victims.

Try not to focus on who is bad and who is good, but on how debilitating hate and dissension can be. When we see the Arabs who are celebrating, it is better to focus on



how tragic it is that this level of hate exists rather than that they are bad people for reveling in our tragedy.

How to support parents:

Send handouts home to parents on how to help their children cope.

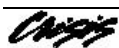
Consider having a parent meeting.

- Open with superintendent or other administrative official
 - Thanks for coming -- we're here to support you and our students
 - We have gathered a few people here to help give us all some perspective
- Have someone from the district who is in charge of safety and security address parents on how diligently you are constantly updating your school plans on how to respond to events that actually threaten the school
- Have a counselor normalize student and parent reactions
 - Not unusual for children to regress, be clingy, want parents closer
 - Not unusual for parents to be more protective of their children
- Give suggestions for how parents can be helpful to their children
 - Tolerate regression
 - Give special indulgences, extra nurturing -- keep close physical space when that seems helpful for children
 - Help children put their words to what this means to them
 - Don't feed their fears -- don't give them fears they don't already have
 - Limit their exposure to the television coverage
 - Keep your home from becoming engulfed in the heaviness of this all of the time -- try to have breaks and reprieve for the kids. It is still OK to play and run and make noise and argue and be whatever "normal" is.

Parents need to not minimize that this is absolutely horrible, but that we can take care of ourselves right here, right now.

What can we do?

- Donate blood.
- Perhaps set up donations at the school with your Red Cross.
- Do what we can to help others who have been impacted by the event.
- How can we keep ourselves looking after one another?
- What can we do to help the victims?
- Are there people who are stranded because of this event? What can we be doing locally?
- Do a local display rather than mail millions of letters to New York and overwhelm the mail system and the locals.



- Quilts for the AIDS victims have been a terrific organized expression of the overwhelming aspect of that phenomenon. What is a group expression for what is happening now?
- Doing something to reach out to all people, regardless of need, of sexual orientation or all of those other distinctions and attitudes which divide us. This is our opportunity to become a more humane and civil society, and there is no time like a time of civil strife to do so. This is our opportunity to become a better people.
- We need to draw ourselves into communion with all those who are struggling and suffering.

