

# **SCHOOL VIOLENCE PREVENTION & RESPONSE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

OFFERED BY THE  
CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS (CASP)

School violence includes a range of experiences from teasing, taunting, harassment, and physical intimidation, to physical assault. In its most extreme form school violence manifests itself as tragic school shootings (Furlong, Kingery, & Bates, in press). School mental health professionals, such as school psychologists, have been (and will continue to be) on the front lines of school violence prevention and response efforts. From our experiences, CASP offers the following recommendations for those policy makers interested in responding to school violence.

## **Prevention Programs**

First and foremost, CASP believes that policy makers must vigorously support school violence prevention programs. From our understanding of the prevention research, we believe that there is much that can, and should, be done to prevent school violence. However, while there currently exists a number of promising violence prevention programs, resources available to fund these programs are limited. Thus, legislation increasing schools' ability to access violence prevention programs is critical. In addition, it is also recommended that flexibility be an important component of violence prevention legislation. Individual school district and site needs should be important considerations when selecting any prevention program (Furlong, Pavelski, & Saxton, in press).

## **School Crisis Intervention Training and Mutual Aid**

CASP recognizes that despite the best of prevention efforts, school crisis events (such as school violence) will likely remain an unfortunate reality of life. Thus, it is critical that schools continue to be prepared to respond efficiently and effectively to these tragedies. CASP recommends that policy makers emphasize the need for continued and on-going training of school personnel in crisis response and intervention. Such training should include (but not necessarily be limited to) the interventions listed in Table 1 (Brock, 2001; Brock, Sandoval, & Lewis, 2001).

In addition, from our experiences responding to major disasters (both within and outside of our State), CASP recommends that disaster response partnerships be formalized among California's school districts. Formation of such partnerships is supported by the California Emergency Services Act. These partnerships institutionalize the practice of "mutual aid" already employed by many emergency response personnel (e.g., firefighters). Mutual aid allows regions to share emergency response resources whenever a given disaster is beyond local control. CASP recommends that the practice of mutual aid be applied to school crisis response and intervention. By making use of mutual aid, regional level crisis intervention support can be provided to schools following disasters that overwhelm district-level resources (Brock, 1998, 1999).

Table 1  
*Specific Crisis Interventions*

Immediate Prevention	Any activity that takes place after a crisis event, but before psychological injury (e.g., minimizing student exposure to scenes of carnage).
Psychological Triage	Activities designed to identify psychological trauma victims and to sort these victims according to the degree of their injury. Used to make treatment priority decisions.
Individual Psychological First Aid	A basic problem-solving model that assist psychological trauma victims identify crisis generated problems and associated coping strategies.
Group Crisis Intervention	A group problems solving model that assists in the dissemination of crisis facts, the sharing of crisis stories, and the development of group coping strategies.
Psycho-Education	Educational efforts designed to inform students, parents, and teachers about the effects of psychological trauma (i.e., signs and symptoms of psychological injury), and how to facilitate adaptive coping (e.g., how to make mental health referrals, how to manage symptoms, etc.).
Memorials	Activities designed to help bring a sense of closure to a psychologically traumatic event (e.g., funerals, services, condolence cards, etc.).

### **School Crisis Intervention Research**

Many victims are left in the wake of school violence. These victims include not only those directly victimized, but also a typically much larger number of in-direct (or vicarious) trauma victims. Supportive school-based interventions for all survivors of violence needs to be immediate and traditionally includes the activities listed in Table 1 (Brock, 2001).

Research addressing the efficacy of the interventions listed above is extremely limited and often flawed (Brock, 2001). In particular, there is virtually no research exploring the school's crisis intervention response to violence. Thus, there is an urgent need for research that identifies those interventions judged most effective. Without this knowledge, school crisis intervention resources may be inappropriately used and, as a result, the needs of students and staff may not be met.

### **Recognition of the Need for Long Term Treatment**

Finally, CASP feels that it is important to recognize that a substantial minority of the survivors of violence will likely require long term psychotherapeutic treatment (Brock, in press; Brock et al., 2001). Thus, it is critical that schools have the knowledge to identify these psychological trauma victims and the resources to ensure that their needs are met. Two existing programs can do much to meet these needs. Specifically the state funded Victims of Crime Program and the federally funded Project SERV (School Emergency Response to Violence) are helpful in the immediate response to trauma victims. However, it must be recognized that psychological trauma victims will have needs that will require many years (not months) of support. Thus, we believe that there is a critical need for legislation that would facilitate the

schools ability to ensure that the long-term treatment needs of those affected by school violence are met.

*References Provided by Members of the California Association of School Psychologists*

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