



President's Bulletin – February/March 2018

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Hello,

I am always grateful for the increase of daylight as we approach the last weeks of winter and await the arrival of spring. Just now, outside my window, I had a hummingbird stop to look in. This fleeting moment reminds me that warmth will return and that all things are possible.

This moment of hope is needed as I continue to struggle with disbelief, sadness and anger related to the school shooting tragedy in Florida. As a professional and parent, the loss of life is always hard. This sudden, wrenching change for so many seems even more difficult. This tragedy affects us all and sadly this pattern of violence and loss is now one of many in recent history in the United States.

There has been much in the media again and so many “sound bites”. Part of my despair is the lack of change after previous mass shootings. There is a media flurry and some speeches but from my perspective no change in the dialogue and no successful attempts to create a public forum for real discussion.

My assumption is that there are many opinions among the SDBP membership on the underpinnings (cause) of this violence and we may have various approaches to solutions (prevention). My hope is that we would be united in a desire to engage in true dialogue on the impact that violence and loss has on children and families and look to find ways to prevent these types of tragedies.

I have gathered some thoughts and information for your consideration and to help in the care of children and families who are touched directly or indirectly with violence. I believe that no matter what we believe are the causes or solutions to these tragedies, it is time for advocacy on a personal, professional and societal level.

A starting point for those involved in Developmental Behavioral care would be:

- Focus on how to support our patients and families through the anxiety and trauma related to recurring school shootings, as well as the potential effects on children's ability to learn in this environment.
- Check out the website for the National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement. Dr David Schonfeld, SDBP past president leads this organization: <https://www.schoolcrisiscenter.org/>
- Watch for stigma associated with mental health diagnoses. An adult I know, who has had severe depression for many years, struggled with the early media discussions of mental health concerns of the shooter and how depression was described. Consider how these media messages could or would have affected the kids and families you counsel.

Advocacy:

- Reach out to your elected officials raising awareness, adding your voice and bringing a Developmental Behavioral health lens. Here is a website to search if you do not know who to contact: <https://www.usa.gov/elected-officials>
- Consider how change occurs in our political world. Many times it is the voices of parents (ex. MADD), or students (ex. Vietnam war, divesting universities from South Africa), or shifting buying patterns (boycotts), or years of advocacy/demonstrations that culminate in pivotal moments, (Dr Martin Luther King's speech “I Have a Dream”, Rosa Parks staying seated on a bus, or Ruby Bridges going to school.)

- Read the letter from Colleen A. Kraft, MD, FAAP, President, American Academy of Pediatrics. It is a call to action. Here is an excerpt and link to full letter.

"We can start by working to advance meaningful legislation that keeps children safe. The American Academy of Pediatrics advocates for stronger state and federal gun laws that protect children, including a ban on assault weapons like the one used in yesterday's school shooting. We also call for stronger background checks, solutions addressing firearm trafficking, and encouraging safe firearm storage. We will also continue to work to ensure that children and their families have access to appropriate mental health services, particularly to address the effects of exposure to violence."

"Although these mass shootings command our attention, our children remain at risk daily for suicide, homicide, and unintentional injury because of the current policy regarding access to guns in the United States. Gun violence is a public health threat to children, and one the American Academy of Pediatrics will continue to take on, in state capitals across the country and in the halls of Congress. Parents across the United States send their children to school every day, and hope and trust they will be safe. As long as children continue to be injured and killed by guns in this country, pediatricians will not rest in our pursuit to keep them safe."

<https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/Pages/Floridashooting.aspx>

Self Care:

- Avoid becoming callous or hardened by these events. It is hard to process all of these events and so many other aspects of trauma, adversity and intolerance. We risk experiencing decreased empathy with public events that repeat, impact negatively on us and leave us feeling powerless to change. This is similar to experiencing decreased empathy if we are "burned-out" with work.
- Find places of hope. I am encouraged by the students who are raising their voices as self-advocates regarding school violence. Is there a way that we as a community of professionals can provide education and serve as resources to support their efforts?

SDBP:

- I will work with Advocacy and Communications committees to provide resources on our web site related to school violence.
- Consider contributing your own resources to the E-library or Discussion Board. I looked a few days ago and could not easily find resources in either location. Our members create the content, please share what you find helpful.

In ending, I encourage you to set a goal for action related to this or another important issue in our society. I will contact my elected representatives to express my views. I will continue to look for hummingbirds outside my window and find moments of silence to practice gratitude and hope for change.

All the best,
Nancy