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November 15, 2019

Dear Etiwanda School District Families,

With increasing frequency, tragic events like the school shooting yesterday in Santa Clarita are impacting communities throughout our state and nation. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families that lost loved ones and those who are injured. Incidents such as this serve as another reminder to heighten our awareness of school safety. First, I want to reassure you that the safety needs of students, staff and the community are our highest priority. At all times, we maintain efforts to ensure that school campuses are safe, secure and peaceful, so that optimum teaching and learning can occur.

One important way parents/guardians can assist with school safety is to frequently reinforce with their children the importance of reporting to an adult any information they hear or see regarding threats made about students causing harm to other students, or anything that makes them feel uncomfortable or fearful. Our District takes all reports of threats seriously, investigating the threat and working with our law enforcement partners to determine the credibility of any such threats. In addition to any action by law enforcement, our District uses disciplinary procedures available to us under California law, as appropriate to each circumstance.

Parents/guardians also play an important role in talking with their children about safety at home, at school and in the community. The National Association of School Psychologists has some helpful resources for parents that can be accessed on our District website under the "Families/Family Resources/Mental Health Resources" tabs.

Over the past ten years, we have worked diligently to implement effective emergency response policies and procedures. Training staff members has been an integral component of our preparation and awareness process. Below is a brief listing of activities and initiatives that have been developed and are currently in place.


- We continuously encourage school personnel to maintain a "heightened awareness" for suspicious activity, suspicious vehicles and suspicious persons. This includes affirming well-established procedures and protocols for checking in and checking out of all ESD sites.
- Our staff receives crisis response training annually from local law enforcement, and conducts tabletop exercises to prepare for various scenarios.
- Each school conducts active shooter drills and lockdown drills to allow students and staff to practice safety procedures.
- We maintain very close relationships with first responders – local police and fire departments – to investigate immediate and long-term threat assessments.

- We provide special attention to perimeter security and access control issues, including reducing the number of doors accessible from the outside, stressing the importance of staff approaching and questioning strangers, reporting suspicious individuals/situations, reviewing security procedures for after-school and evening activities and building use, and identifying visiting service personnel and vendors.
- We maintain a locked classroom door protocol. While on campus, teachers keep their classroom doors locked at all times.
- The District reviews and updates its school safety plans on an annual basis and as needed during the year.
- We have increased school counselors at the middle school level and have full or part-time school psychologists assigned to support each school site.
- Regularly, our Safety Committee and District Risk Management Team meet with principals, other District staff and law enforcement representatives to review best practices as they relate to school safety issues. Additionally, each school site maintains its own campus safety team.
- We review staffing and supervision plans that stress the importance of adult supervision before, during, and after school, inside school buildings, on campus, and in common areas.
- We review and test emergency communications mechanisms and procedures on a regular basis.
- We are enhancing security on our district campuses by utilizing *Measure I* funds which includes the installation of campus security cameras and office panic buttons.

In closing, please know that the Etiwanda School District is committed to a proactive and coordinated effort to assess, identify, prevent, intervene, and manage any situation that may cause or have the potential to cause a safety concern or threat. We appreciate your continued support, understanding, and partnership in maintaining the safest learning environments for our children.

Our thoughts, prayers, and support continue to be with Saugus High School and the Santa Clarita community. Although these horrific events have deeply shaken us, together we continue to stand in love, support and fellowship of one another.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Shawn Judson".

Shawn Judson, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Enclosures

Talking to Children About Violence: Tips for Parents and Teachers

High profile acts of violence, particularly in schools, can confuse and frighten children who may feel in danger or worry that their friends or loved-ones are at risk. They will look to adults for information and guidance on how to react. Parents and school personnel can help children feel safe by establishing a sense of normalcy and security and talking with them about their fears.

1. **Reassure children that they are safe.** Emphasize that schools are very safe. Validate their feelings. Explain that all feelings are okay when a tragedy occurs. Let children talk about their feelings, help put them into perspective, and assist them in expressing these feelings appropriately.
2. **Make time to talk.** Let their questions be your guide as to how much information to provide. Be patient; children and youth do not always talk about their feelings readily. Watch for clues that they may want to talk, such as hovering around while you do the dishes or yard work. Some children prefer writing, playing music, or doing an art project as an outlet. Young children may need concrete activities (such as drawing, looking at picture books, or imaginative play) to help them identify and express their feelings.
3. **Keep your explanations developmentally appropriate.**
 - **Early elementary school** children need brief, simple information that should be balanced with reassurances that their school and homes are safe and that adults are there to protect them. Give simple examples of school safety like reminding children about exterior doors being locked, child monitoring efforts on the playground, and emergency drills practiced during the school day.
 - **Upper elementary and early middle school** children will be more vocal in asking questions about whether they truly are safe and what is being done at their school. They may need assistance separating reality from fantasy. Discuss efforts of school and community leaders to provide safe schools.
 - **Upper middle school and high school** students will have strong and varying opinions about the causes of violence in schools and society. They will share concrete suggestions about how to make school safer and how to prevent tragedies in society. Emphasize the role that students have in maintaining safe schools by following school safety guidelines (e.g. not providing building access to strangers, reporting strangers on campus, reporting threats to the school safety made by students or community members, etc.), communicating any personal safety concerns to school administrators, and accessing support for emotional needs.
4. **Review safety procedures.** This should include procedures and safeguards at school and at home. Help children identify at least one adult at school and in the community to whom they go if they feel threatened or at risk.
5. **Observe children's emotional state.** Some children may not express their concerns verbally. Changes in behavior, appetite, and sleep patterns can also indicate a child's level of anxiety or discomfort. In most children, these symptoms will ease with reassurance and

time. However, some children may be at risk for more intense reactions. Children who have had a past traumatic experience or personal loss, suffer from depression or other mental illness, or with special needs may be at greater risk for severe reactions than others. Seek the help of mental health professional if you are at all concerned.

6. **Limit television viewing of these events.** Limit television viewing and be aware if the television is on in common areas. Developmentally inappropriate information can cause anxiety or confusion, particularly in young children. Adults also need to be mindful of the content of conversations that they have with each other in front of children, even teenagers, and limit their exposure to vengeful, hateful, and angry comments that might be misunderstood.
7. **Maintain a normal routine.** Keeping to a regular schedule can be reassuring and promote physical health. Ensure that children get plenty of sleep, regular meals, and exercise. Encourage them to keep up with their schoolwork and extracurricular activities but don't push them if they seem overwhelmed.

Suggested Points to Emphasize When Talking to Children

- Schools are safe places. School staff works with parents and public safety providers (local police and fire departments, emergency responders, hospitals, etc.) to keep you safe.
- The school building is safe because ... (cite specific school procedures).
- We all play a role in the school safety. Be observant and let an adult know if you see or hear something that makes you feel uncomfortable, nervous or frightened.
- There is a difference between reporting, tattling or gossiping. You can provide important information that may prevent harm either directly or anonymously by telling a trusted adult what you know or hear.
- Although there is no absolute guarantee that something bad will never happen, it is important to understand the difference between the **possibility** of something happening and **probability** that it will affect you (our school community).
- Senseless violence is hard for everyone to understand. Doing things that you enjoy, sticking to your normal routine, and being with friends and family help make us feel better and keep us from worrying about the event.
- Sometimes people do bad things that hurt others. They may be unable to handle their anger, under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or suffering from mental illness. Adults (parents, teachers, police officers, doctors, faith leaders) work very hard to get those people help and keep them from hurting others. It is important for all of us to know how to get help if we feel really upset or angry and to stay away from drugs and alcohol.
- Stay away from guns and other weapons. Tell an adult if you know someone has a gun. Access to guns is one of the leading risk factors for deadly violence.
- Violence is never a solution to personal problems. Students can be part of the positive solution by participating in anti-violence programs at school, learning conflict mediation skills, and seeking help from an adult if they or a peer is struggling with anger, depression, or other emotions they cannot control.

NASP has additional information for parents and educators on school safety, violence prevention, children's trauma reactions, and crisis response at www.nasponline.org.

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Talking to Children About Violence: Tips for Parents and Educators

Families and school personnel play a critical role in helping to reestablish a sense of normalcy and security for children after an act of violence occurs. Follow these key reminders and visit www.nasponline.org/children-and-violence to learn more.



Reaffirm Safety

Emphasize that schools are very safe. Let children speak about their feelings and validate all reactions to the event. Support the appropriate expression of their feelings and help to put them in perspective.



Make Time to Talk

Let children's questions guide the information provided. Be patient and look for clues that a child wants to talk. Young children may need concrete activities (e.g., imaginative play) and some older children may prefer writing or playing music.



Keep Explanations Developmentally Appropriate

Early Elementary

Provide simple information balanced by assurance of safety.

Upper Elementary & Early Middle

Answer questions and assist in separating reality from fantasy.

Upper Middle & High

Emphasize student role in safety & how to access support.



Review Safety Procedures

Help children identify one adult at school and in the community that they can go to if they feel threatened or at risk. Review procedures and safeguards in school and home settings.



Observe Children's Emotional State

Some will not express themselves verbally but changes in behavior, appetite, or sleep patterns can indicate anxiety or stress. Seek help from a mental health professional for those with more intense reactions.



Maintain a Normal Routine

Keep a regular schedule to assure and promote physical and mental health. Encourage maintenance of school work and extracurricular activities but do not push children if they seem overwhelmed. Limit TV exposure.