

## Supporting Vulnerable Students in Stressful Times: Tips for Parents

The 2016 presidential election has had a significant impact on many families in America, and feelings of uncertainty are particularly heightened as various communities and families struggle to understand its effect on their future. This marks an important time for families and schools to work together to foster supportive relationships, to help children understand their emotional reactions, and to teach effective coping and conflict resolution strategies. The tips and related resources in this document are intended to help you support your children.

- **It is important for parents to understand the effect of stressors and trauma on life functioning.** Experiencing stress and adversity can contribute to both internal symptoms (such as anxiety, depression, grief, fear, anger, and isolation) and external behaviors (such as reactivity, aggression, and behavior problems). Children, in particular, may not understand the political process and may be fearful about impending changes. They may also have concerns regarding statements that have been communicated in the media. Recent events in their communities or reported in the media may cause children to fear that they or their family and friends may be targeted because of their gender, cultural background, religious background, or sexual orientation.
- **The following represent concerning reactions that you should monitor in your children.**
  - Isolation or refusal to attend school.
  - Withdrawal from peers or social activities.
  - Withdrawal from extracurricular activities at school or in the community.
  - Reports of bullying, harassment, or intimidation in school, the community, or on social media.
- **You can promote a sense of safety for children by doing the following.**
  - Set limits around television and social media viewing, because too much exposure can increase fears.
  - Provide a consistent structure and routine for children, as this helps to generate a sense of psychological safety.
  - Provide a safe place for your children to talk about their fears.
  - Encourage healthy and safe coping strategies.
  - Emphasize that there are many adults in this country who care deeply about them and who will do all they can to ensure that children and their families are safe and remain together.
  - Maintain contact with your children's teachers, as they can connect children with supports inside the school where they can talk through their feelings and reactions.
  - Seek help immediately from your school's psychologist, counselor, social worker, and/or nurse if your child is experiencing strong emotional reactions and/or you have noticed significant changes to his/her behavior.

- Immediately report any instances of bullying, harassment, or discrimination that your child observes or experiences to school administrators.
- Report hate crimes to local law enforcement and the Southern Poverty Law Center (<https://www.splcenter.org/reportthate>).
- **Adult reactions can influence children’s’ reactions. Children may look to adults to determine how to respond and cope with stress. You can model appropriate coping strategies in the following ways.**
  - Communicate with loved ones about feelings and healthy coping strategies.
  - Take care of your own physical health.
  - Make time to do things you enjoy with family and friends in your community.
  - Access school and community resources. Many schools have parent and/or cultural liaisons who can help connect families to supports in their communities.
  - Help others in your community by referring them to helpful resources.
- **Reinforce and focus on your child’s strengths, and promote their sense of belonging. All children and families bring unique skills, strengths, and knowledge to our society. Build and emphasize those strengths in the following ways.**
  - Help your children find others who allow them to share their knowledge about their origins, customs, and culture.
  - Identify positive activities that can help your children feel they are heard. For example, students can write a letter to the president-elect expressing their hopes and desires for the new administration.
  - Identify activities your children can engage in to show support and solidarity for each other and for their local and school communities.
- **Remember that at any time, should you or your children struggle with feelings of stress, please reach out to your school and community organizations for support.** While many families may fear drawing attention to their diverse backgrounds, there are individuals and organizations who want to help. Talk to representatives of your school or local cultural or faith organizations. Other organizations include:
  - The International Rescue Committee [http://www.rescue.org/where/united\\_states](http://www.rescue.org/where/united_states)
  - The State Refugee Coordinators <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/orr/resource/orr-funded-programs-key-contacts>
  - Congreso de Latinos Unidos, Inc. <http://www.congreso.net/about/agency-profile/>
  - PFLAG <https://www.pflag.org>
  - Gay, Lesbian, & Straight Education Network (GLSEN) <http://www.glsen.org>

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*Note.* This handout was adapted from the NASP handout, “Supporting Marginalized Students in Stressful Times: Tips for Educators.” Schools and community agencies may adapt this handout to local needs for educational and student support purposes as long as proper credit is given to NASP.