

## School Safety: three steps to make the peace

The recent tragic school shooting reminds us of the important role each child and each adult has in maintaining the safety of a school. Here are three actions children, youth or adults can take to improve the safety of their learning community:

- ◆ **Treat each other with respect.** Encourage, teach and above all role model respectful behavior. Identify acts of kindness, give attention to positive and cooperative behavior. Encourage children and youth to 'make the peace' in their classroom and hallway. Many districts teach all students conflict resolution skills, and train students to be peer mediators to help resolve conflicts before they become harm.
- ◆ **Address name-calling and bullying directly.** Both students and staff can say clearly that name-calling and intimidation is not appropriate 'in our school.' Staff can help to change the climate of harassment by giving positive attention to the person being bullied. Publicly and directly tell the person the who has been bullied that what happened to them was not ok, and check to see if there is any assistance you can give them. After an intervention with name-calling, acts of intimidation or harassment, check back in with both the victim and the offender to see if the offending behavior has stopped.
- ◆ **Take threats seriously.** If a student or an adult says they are thinking of harming themselves or others, tell a trusted adult. As a student, ask an adult to help you talk with the person who is making threats. As a staff person, work with both student support staff, administration and law enforcement to determine the seriousness of the threat. Work to address the needs of people affected or made fearful by a threat.

For adults, there is an additional action step:

- ◆ **Keep weapons away from children and youth.** Through newsletters, announcements at PTA/PTSO meetings and at parent/teacher conferences, at ball games and concerts, remind adults that if they own a gun, to be sure that the weapon is disassembled, locked away and that the ammunition is locked in a separate place.

In spite of incidents like school shootings, schools remain one of the safer places a child or adult can attend in our society. A person is three times more likely to be struck by lightning than to be shot in school. By working together, and supporting one another, parents, students and staff can be make the school safe for everyone.