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F. Preventing Violent Tragedies in Our Schools

Reprinted from *A Practical Guide for Crisis Response in Our Schools*
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Today, we are faced with an increase in violence including assaults and gang activity. We are seeing an increase in the frequency of substance abuse, self-mutilation, suicide, abandonment of newborn babies, and serious injuries and deaths from automobile accidents. We are also contending with new types of violence including terrorist attacks, hostage-taking, snipers, murders, “hit lists,” threatening graffiti, bomb scares and real bombs.

In response to this disturbing trend, The American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress published *A Practical Guide for Crisis Response in Our Schools*. This guide is being utilized as a “Crisis Response Plan” by school districts across the country. The importance of having an organized and preconceived strategy for responding effectively in the wake of a school-based tragedy cannot be underscored enough.

In the face of a rapidly changing zeitgeist, we must address means of *preventing* violent tragedies in our schools. Specifically, we need to assist children in developing their communication, coping and problem-solving skills. The following should be considered.

We must help our children to:

- develop and enhance their communication and problem-solving skills,
- understand the importance of articulating their feelings about themselves and for others,
- know that it is okay to err on the side of caution when expressing their concerns about others,
- regularly remind them that they can turn to school support personnel who will take the time to listen and respond to them,
- identify physiological changes in their bodies which may precede or coincide with feelings of frustration and anger,
- understand which behaviors/actions cause others to become frustrated and angry,
- become aware of and identify negative self-statements that generate feelings of frustration and anger,
- learn to replace self-defeating statements with positive coping statements, and
- learn to make more adaptive goal-directed decisions when faced with feelings of frustration (e.g., deciding to walk-away from altercations... to take a few moments to “cool down”... to express oneself assertively... to implement relaxation techniques, or to utilize conflict resolution skills).