



E-Breaking News: Response to Connecticut School Shootings

As pediatricians we know the pain that the death of a child causes a family. The recent tragedy in Newtown, CT serves as a reminder of the gun violence that children face every day in this country. This event has renewed our resolve to assure that children have a safe environment in which to grow and learn. We share every AAP member's heartfelt desire to respond as strongly and actively as possible to this horrific incident and to do all we can to prevent such tragedies in the future.

The AAP leadership and staff have been working since the moment that news of the tragedy broke to respond to this event. In this email, we would like to catalogue the actions that the AAP has taken since Friday and to alert you that we have sent a [letter](#) to President Obama and Congressional leadership to communicate the Academy's policy priorities to protect the nation's children. We strongly urged the country's leaders to take up gun control and improve access to mental health services for all children and adolescents. We also are asking each of you to write your member of Congress to convey the same message. Please [click here](#) to access a template message for your members of Congress.

We have been working since last Friday to provide information and resources to our members and the public, to support the Newtown community, and to identify next steps in our continuing advocacy for improved safety and mental health for infants, children, adolescents and young adults. We are focusing on three main areas of action, information and communication:

- 1) Helping children and families (and pediatricians) in the aftermath of traumatic events;
- 2) Reinforcing our commitment to strengthen preventive and treatment mental health services for children and youth; and
- 3) Reiterating and advocating for our firm commitment to the AAP policy on firearms safety.

Immediate response: In the immediate aftermath of such a crisis, we recognize that our members will be on the front lines caring for children and parents who are feeling the effects of grief and fear associated with tragedies of this magnitude. We also know that the media will be searching for reliable advice to help the nation's families to cope.

On Friday, the day of the shooting, both AAP.org and HealthyChildren.org featured [resources](#) specific to disaster response, school shootings, and talking with children in times of crisis. This page includes a special section on [talking with children](#), which has been featured prominently in the media over the past several days. This list of resources also contains a link to the AAP policy on firearm injuries published in October

2012, which includes a call for restoration of the ban on the sale of assault weapons to the general public. In addition to being featured prominently on our websites, these resources were distributed widely via social media.

Also on Friday, through its Disaster Preparedness Advisory Council (DPAC), the AAP connected the federal government's response team to the AAP Connecticut Chapter leaders, to ensure that pediatricians' viewpoint and expertise were reflected in efforts to help children. AAP leaders also offered support to the AAP Connecticut Chapter as members' needs are identified.

Media response: Beginning on Friday and through today, AAP spokespersons have contributed to stories in the Associated Press, USA Today, Denver Post, New York Daily News, the Boston Globe, and on NPR, as well as in social media.

- David Schonfeld, MD, FAAP, DPAC member, has been interviewed for many media stories following the shooting and has briefed other pediatricians who have been responding to requests from the media and others.
<http://usat.ly/UdGDle>
- AAP past president Dr. Judy Palfrey and Dr. Sean Palfrey were featured in a Boston Globe article capturing the profound effect that violence toward children has on pediatricians. <http://b.globe.com/Ym0NMC>
- Dan Fagbuyi, MD, FAAP, member of DPAC and the Council on Communications and Media (COCM), was interviewed by NPR <http://n.pr/TZsLrj> and participated in a Facebook chat hosted by USA Today, advising parents on how to talk with their children in the wake of tragedies, and the importance of shielding them from extensive media coverage over the weekend.
- Alanna Levine, MD, FAAP, appeared on an episode of the Dr. Oz show about talking with children after tragic events. <http://www.doctoroz.com/videos/stories-survival-newtown-pt-2>
- A story in TIME magazine features AAP immediate past president Dr. Bob Block. <http://healthland.time.com/2012/12/18/school-security-why-its-so-hard-to-keep-kids-safe/>
- COCM members also blogged about this topic: Gwenn O'Keeffe, MD, FAAP, for [Parenting magazine](#); Claire McCarthy, MD, FAAP, blogged for [Boston.com](#); and Wendy Sue Swanson, MD, FAAP, for [Seattle Children's Hospital](#).
- Vic Strasburger, MD, FAAP, was interviewed for an [ABC News](#) story about violence in entertainment media.
- Pediatricians Bob Sege and John O'Reilly co-authored an Op Ed in the [Boston Globe](#) that summarizes the AAP policy statement on firearms and puts it in a local context.

More stories will emerge in the days to come.

President's message: On Friday, Dr. McInerney issued a [statement](#) that was disseminated via Web, social media and the AAP media mailing list as well as to the staff and leadership. This message was picked up by many television news programs

as coverage of the shooting unfolded.

Community support: Dr. Schonfeld traveled to Newtown to meet with Sandy Hook elementary school staff, teachers/staff in the school district, pediatricians, mental health professionals and others in a position to help children to provide "just-in-time" training and support. Members interested in accessing relevant training can access "Supporting Children's Mental Health Needs in the Aftermath of a Disaster: Pediatric Pearls" at <http://adph.org/ALPHTN/index.asp?id=5276>

The **Connecticut chapter** has communicated the following:

The CT Chapter of the AAP has been working since Saturday morning to coordinate efforts to help wherever and whenever possible. We have been in contact with those directly involved, including the Newtown School Medical Advisor, the Governor's office, and chapter members. The generous response from our members has been heartwarming. They have offered their time, their expertise and their love. We know we need to take care of the affected families, all the children of the Newtown community, and our members who live and take care of children there.

The CTAAP has a close, on-going collaborative relationship with the CT Council of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. There was an email sent to members of both organizations on Saturday asking for volunteers. We received over 150 responses within 24 hours. The CTAAP members will be working with mental health colleagues for the next weeks, months and sadly, probably years.

We wish to thank all of our AAP colleagues from across the country who have sent messages of support and offers of help. We all appreciate it more than you can imagine.

Policy and advocacy: The AAP [statement](#) on Firearm-Related Injuries in the Pediatric Population, published in October, is central to advocacy moving forward on this issue. The AAP supports reinstatement of the ban on assault weapon sales, a ban on the sale of high-capacity magazines, mandatory waiting periods and background checks for all gun purchases and other strict gun control policies. Counseling about safe storage of firearms and ammunition also is important.

The AAP leadership and staff are working closely with partner organizations to raise the voice of the nation's pediatricians on Capitol Hill and among state legislatures. We also will join in coalition with child advocacy organizations, including the Brady Center, to ensure that appropriate legislation is developed to promote the safety of children. When Congress reconvenes in January, AAP representatives will be there, leading the charge to effect change by pushing for legislation, funding and policy recommendations that support community mental health systems and respond quickly to ameliorate toxic stress.

Member support and advocacy tools: There are many actions that individual pediatricians can take at this time to help children and families. For example:

- Send a letter-to-the-editor to your local paper, asking for changes in gun laws, media violence, and mental health support. You can start with this [sample letter](#) (AAP login required), which is approximately 200 words. The letter can be personalized according to your own experience and your community. Remember to check with your local paper for word limits and submission instructions. You can find appropriate media contacts for your local area on federaladvocacy.aap.org, under the "Media Outreach" tab, where you will find a media database searchable by zip code.
- On the home page of federaladvocacy.aap.org (login required), you will find a draft email and speaking points to share with your federal legislators called "Keeping Children Safe" to urge swift, bold Congressional action to keep children healthy and safe.
- Talk with your school administrators and/or local school district officials about daily safety and security measures as well as disaster plans and drills.
- [Talk](#) with parents and children who come into your office to gauge how they are feeling and help them cope after this national tragedy.
- As a routine, include discussion of "media diets" with parents and kids of all ages. Screen time, exposure to [violence](#), and use of social media can all impact children's and adolescents' mental and emotional health. Ask parents to have the conversation with other parents about [guns in the home](#).
- Address firearm safety as part of your routine anticipatory guidance with children of all ages. Ask about the presence of firearms in the home, and counsel parents who do keep guns to store them unloaded in a locked case, with the ammunition locked separately. While the safest home for children is one without a gun, safe storage practices can significantly reduce the risk of gun injury or death.
- Advise families to remove guns from the home of any child or teenager who is depressed. Educate families that suicide attempts with a gun are very likely to be fatal, and that the presence of a gun in the home is associated with increased risk of suicide among adolescents.

As noted, AAP.org and Healthychildren.org are excellent starting points for information and resources. In addition, we are providing several sets of speaking points for members on [firearm injury prevention](#), [school safety](#), and [mental health](#) (including toxic stress). With the addition of violent media entertainment and the media's reporting of violent events, these are the main areas in which our information and advocacy efforts are centered. AAP staff and leaders have developed a [web resource](#) tailored for AAP members' use in responding to this situation in their own communities. It includes many of the resources mentioned above, as well as issue briefs and other communication and advocacy tools.

Longer term response: The AAP is in the process of identifying representatives from key AAP Committees, Councils, and Sections to assist AAP leaders to identify appropriate short- and long-term recovery strategies when there has been a school shooting.

We want to emphasize that support for the children, families and school community of

Newtown remains a priority, and we will stay in close touch with the Connecticut AAP Chapter.

Those who care for children will continue to look for ways to comfort, support, nurture and protect them. We call on all decision makers to do the same. At this time, we urge continued support and vigilance for the well-being of the Newtown community.

We know that there are many AAP members and colleagues who have worked tirelessly to protect children and prevent future tragedies. Thank you to the entire AAP community for pulling together to respond to this event in the best way possible.

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