



[American Council for School Social Work Response to Mass Shootings in El Paso, TX and Dayton, OH](#)

The American Council for School Social Work offers sincerest condolences to families and communities impacted by the most recent (and all) mass shootings in the United States. While the impact is felt far and wide, we want to emphasize the impact that these tragedies can have on the school experience. We believe there are crucial student concerns to be aware of, but also important insights about what your school social worker or mental health professional can do about them. We believe our message is particularly salient given that the new school year begins within days or weeks for most students.

Statement

ACSSW believes that the school experience can not only be a viable opportunity for healing after such atrocities, but also a place for prosocial development of students so that they learn the value of human life and the ills of hatred and division that continue to pervade our country. While we agree that there is a need in this country for increased focus on mental health care, we echo the American Psychological Association (APA) that at times of mass violence, mental illness is not the major cause for such acts, as only a small percentage of violent crimes are committed by those who are diagnosed with mental illness.

Student Concerns

In the immediate aftermath of community trauma such as mass shooting, students may have lots of questions and exhibit many concerns and emotions. Normal grief responses may include denial, emotional numbing, anger, rage, rushes of anxiety (pangs), sadness, fear, confusion, difficulty sleeping, regression in children, stomach upset, loss of appetite, "hysterical materializations" (transient visual or auditory misperceptions of the loved one's image or voice and many other potential symptoms. These symptoms are similar to those often seen in the acute post-traumatic period.

What Can School Social Workers Do

School social workers welcoming students back to school in the next few days and weeks can use this opportunity to do any of the following:

- Guide a discussion among students about this community trauma or any local trauma
- Implement universal school interventions focused on explaining what has occurred (in age appropriate language)
- Engage students in universal interventions that involve a discussion about how racism and bigotry have often led to violence and will likely continue unless groups of people advocate for change
- Lead their students and schools in a pledge to combat hatred within their walls and community.
- Assist parents with the same types of discussion and efforts for their children at home

This not only empowers students, but also engages the community in collective healing.