

Last night, Beyond Differences National Teen Board met in response to the recent deeply tragic gun violence at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas. They worked together to discuss the issues they felt were most pressing, to decide what they wanted to center in the conversation, and to best frame the issues that confront fellow youth across the country.

Below are some general crisis response guidelines:

We anticipate additional trauma, trigger responses and questions coming into your classrooms tomorrow morning. At a time of year when students should be celebrating their accomplishments, they may be acting out, drawing inward, and displaying displaced emotion in reaction to the news headlines. We would like to offer a few lesson plans that can be used in your classrooms or advisory sessions to:

- a) Help children process their emotions in a safe, independent way
- b) Help facilitate conversations about feelings that may not yet have words
- c) Address deeply-entrenched cultural biases that invoke fear or self-doubt
- d) Remind youth of their power and agency to push back against hate

Some guidance on crisis response lessons:

- When talking about these recent events, let the conversation be student-led. Try to answer questions and remember it's alright to say "I don't know"
- Center and validate students' feelings & model that all feelings are OK.
- Try to focus on the victims instead of the perpetrator or the extent of the violence. What were the victims' names? If there is any information about their likes, activities or associations that information will help humanize them and honor them.
- Avoid getting into ideological debates. Remind students that the space held is for processing feelings and being respectful.
- We feel helpless in times like these and that there is no sweeping solution for the cultural trends that lead to these heinous acts. Remind students that change happens in small steps and that youth are the most powerful force in cultural shifts. Learning how to counter stereotypes and misinformation is a small but important way for our communities to push back against this kind of violence.
- Talk to students about what is being done in their schools and homes to keep them safe.

Lessons

Metacognitive Journaling - Students can draw or write how they feel at the beginning of the conversation and at the end of the conversation. We build a growth-mindset when we see how our feelings grow and shift over time.

Guided Art Activity - Teachers can focus the drawing prompts on students' feelings and ask them to draw symbols of hope, change or actions they feel are important during times like these. Also, they can have a space to draw symbols of their fears and insecurities as well.

A DEI note on doing these lessons right now:

To those teachers from marginalized groups holding histories of violence, teaching these lessons may be particularly painful. Take care of your own emotional needs before trying to hold this space for others. We hope these resources are supportive of you in this moment.

To teachers whose identity groups are not historically affected by this kind of violence, allyship is powerful and can be essential to healing communities. Be sure to educate yourself and actively listen to members of marginalized groups if they feel compelled to talk about the event.

The following metacognitive journal and guided drawing prompts were formulated by members of the National Teen Board in response to the deeply tragic gun violence within this last week.

Guided Drawing Prompts:

These prompts can be used to help young people process what has happened in a way that lends to a calm relaxed state of mind. It can be used with students in multiple languages and with those with neuro differences.

- Draw something that reflects the place where you found out about the violence, put that image in a box, write words around the box or draw something that reflects how you are feeling. Try to use as many words or images to describe your feelings as you can.
- Write what you wish to say to (the families of the victims, law makers, teachers or the people in the communities where violence has taken place). Put a box around it. Write words describe how you feel after writing sentiment.
- Create an image that reflects how you felt when you heard the news then draw an image of how you hope to feel.
- Draw something that reflects something hopeful. Reflect on how you can spread this sense of hope.

Metacognitive Journal Prompts:

- Were you surprised by this incident? Why and why not?
- Who does America belong to?
- What can you do in your community to rebuild hope?

- Do you feel safe? Why or why not?
- How do you wish the adults in your world would recognize this incident?
- How does this impact your community? How do you think it will impact other communities?
- How have your feelings evolved about (guns, race, or mental health care) in America?

Teaching tips:

The most recent shootings can cause students to remember back to other periods of fear and unrest related to other shootings or violence. This is not unusual and should be normalized and patterns can be acknowledged. However, teachers should reframe these feelings by drawing on the student's strengths and offering ways for them to use these assets to feel safe and find hope.

An example of this sentiment is reflected here by a member of the Beyond Differences National Teen Board:

"When I was little, I was in a concert and we were all singing and I looked up into the balcony where all the parents and the teachers were. Instead of them all being happy, they were all crying. It was then I learned about Sandy Hook and the murder of kids just like me. Throughout my life I have lived in fear of school shootings. I used to have panic attacks during active shooter drills. I was thinking today that the shooter in Uvalde is around the same age as me. I wonder if he has memories of the Sandy Hook shooting like I do? What should we have done? How could this happen again?" - Lydia L.

Acknowledging this student's memory as being incredibly insightful and important is the first focus of interaction. Then complimenting her ability to search for compassion for the purportator. Finally, she should be praised for her questions as this is what will help bring about change. The last step is to facilitate her connecting with others in the class to formulate ways to be more inclusive.

Students may recall other forms of violence in their lives

"In my home country, there was so much violence. We gave up everything to come to America and now the violence is here, too. What if we came all this way and have to flee again? So many people in America have hate. Many hate immigrants.hat if they target us even more?" -
Adriana L

Here teachers should not be quick to deny or correct the student's observations or to say violence does not happen in America. Refocusing the student on how they feel in this moment and how their feelings have changed in the past will enable them to see that feeling change. Next, ask what would make them feel more connected with people and places that would make them feel safe.

DEI Notes:

- Some students may not have come from places where gun violence is common and can feel suddenly unsafe; since this is not a universal experience, it may be shocking for some of your students to hear..

“I was not in America when Sandy Hook happened,so the first school shooting I remember is Marjory Stoneman Douglas. As someone who was not raised around violence like this, I was shocked by the madness as well as the fact that this was something that was commonplace. How are school shootings just something that happens in America? Why do they let this happen?”

Teachers should explain that while this has happened and it is a deep tragedy, it is not as common as it seems. They should acknowledge that not everyone thinks that shootings should be seen as common place and that there are many people working to prevent school shootings

- Some students will feel more unsafe because of an affinity with the victims or the perceived commonality with the shooter.

“I look at this shooter and demographically he and I are the same, Latinx, low income and male. I wonder how people will react to me tomorrow? Are they going to be even more afraid of me than before? I think Latinx boys will need more empathy and compassion in the coming weeks, I hope adults will see them and give them the empathy and respect they need. Maybe if the shooter was given this, we would not be where we are today.” - Juan F.

Here we have a student pointing out how implicit bias and racism can become greater during periods of violence. He is revealing what he and his community needs. This should be noted and praised. His willingness to be vulnerable will enable him and you to best serve the Latinx community. It should also be noted he has offered a prevention solution. Highlighting this idea and giving him agency to help make this change will give him power to generate hope for himself and others.

- In communities of color, the violence of the past nine days has been spoken about extensively in churches and community spaces. Foreign language media has covered it extensively. Many families have reengaged talks with their children on how to be safe. It is important to be mindful that children in a classroom may have different levels of exposure to these events. To some children these events are distant while to others the walk to school may have been terrifying.