



*“Promoting Academic Success for Every Student”
A Division of the American School Counseling Association*

An Open Letter from the California Association of School Counselors Board of Directors to Educators & Families on Nonviolence

Every generation experiences historical events that become defining moments in our students’ lives, some of which can lead to trauma. With every crisis, there is an opportunity for learning and building trusting relationships. In the spirit of nonviolence, as promoted by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., “Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding.” The California Association of School Counselors (CASC) denounces all acts of violence and promotes teaching nonviolent communication in our schools. The storming of the U.S. Capitol and the attack on the United States Congress have left many wondering how to move forward. The events that took place on January 6, 2021, were an attempt to overthrow the will of the people and a threat to a diverse democracy that aspires to be inclusive of all voices and perspectives. The United States is historically a divided nation with a long history of racial division and oppression. As a nation, we must confront the hard truths that white supremacy and racism are rooted in the structures and systems of our society. Adults and children alike witnessed America’s racist roots on full display with images of Confederate flags, a noose hanging at the Capitol, and references to concentration camps. With the threat of continued violence and the uncertainty surrounding the current political and racial climate, our youth are struggling to feel safe and make sense of it all. The repeated trauma our nation is experiencing, paired with the plethora of bias, nonfactual information, and influences of social media greatly impact students’ mental health, interpersonal relationships, and emotional well-being.

All individuals who work within the school system have the ethical obligation to address historical and current events that weigh heavily on our students and infringe upon equity, social justice, and anti-racism. Educating students about the differences between free speech and hate speech, along with the historical legacy of extremist movements in the United States, are essential to the conversation. We appeal to all school administrators to provide guidance and support to staff and promote open dialogue. We understand that these are difficult conversations with varying perspectives, and there may be an inclination not to talk at all. **Silence implies complicity.** We must speak up and speak out when injustice happens, and we must promote a positive school climate for all students. Educators hold a responsibility to teach digital citizenship, media literacy, critical thinking and promote empathy and understanding. We encourage families to reinforce these skills. Such courageous conversations are more than just politics; they are matters of human rights and human life.

So what do we do? Children are bombarded by images of violence in the media and must be given the tools, support, and a safe space to process their feelings and questions in line with their developmental stage. If you notice that your child is impacted by these traumatic events, set boundaries and limit social media and news consumption. It is crucial that we listen with unconditional positive regard and without interjection, and that we encourage peaceful, non-judgmental conversations. We may not have all the answers, but these conversations can be teachable moments.



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Here are some suggestions for dialogue starters:

- What do you know about the events that occurred?
- How do you feel about what happened?
- What questions do you have?
- How do you determine what is fact versus opinion?

For more resources, please visit the “Anti-Racism and Equity” page on the <http://covid19k12counseling.org> website. There you will also have access to CASC’s position statement on “[Equity, Social Justice, and Anti-Racism](#),” published June 2020. If your child needs additional support, please reach out to your school counselor.

This is a pivotal time in the psyche of the American collective. We are in a period of societal reckoning and self-reflection. Our children will remember and reflect on what we, as adults, did or did not do. CASC continues its commitment to provide support and work with state leaders to establish policies and advocate for the inclusion, safety, and respect of all students.