



Addressing Violence and Intolerance: Guidance for Families

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The American Academy of Pediatrics recently announced an initiative to identify new approaches to protect children, adolescents and young adults from the epidemic of violence that they are exposed to in their everyday lives. This initiative will address gun violence as well as the underlying contributors of racism, religious intolerance, homophobia, xenophobia, terrorism or any other form of intolerance.

The Minnesota Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics welcomes this initiative and is equally committed to advocating on behalf of children and their families who are impacted by violence and intolerance, along with the pediatricians who care for them. As child health experts, we are in a unique position to partner with families and policy makers alike to improve the safety of children's homes and communities.

We must speak out.

The tragic events of the past few weeks have once more brought into sharp focus the reality of hate, intolerance and racism in communities around the world. From St. Paul, Dallas, Orlando and Baton Rouge to Nice, Baghdad and Aleppo, children are witness to, or victims of, horrible acts of violence.

We join with our fellow pediatricians in condemning all these acts of violence. We mourn the victims of gun-related violence and deaths in our country, including the unarmed black men unjustly killed by the police as well as the police officers murdered as they worked to protect their fellow citizens. We condemn the current hate-speech and acts of violence aimed at people of color, immigrants, Muslims and members of the LGBTQ community.

We must discuss these issues with children.

As pediatricians, we are tasked with partnering with parents to protect children and to help them along their journey towards achieving their full potential. Faced with this seemingly overwhelming onslaught of violence and news of violence, we will continue to be a strong voice for children and teens.

We will talk with families and provide them with resources on discussing violence, racism and religious intolerance with their children. We will highlight the significant impacts that racism and other forms of hate and xenophobia have on the health and health outcomes of children in particular, and whole communities in general. First Lady Michelle Obama said it best. "With every word we utter, with every action we take, we know our kids are watching us. We, as parents, are their most important role models."

Resources for families on how to talk to their children about the violence they may be exposed to and about racial bias can be found through the AAP's Healthy Children website. The link is:
<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Crime-Violence-and-Your-Child.aspx>.

The link for resources on how to talk to children about racial bias is:

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/healthy-living/emotional-wellness/Building-Resilience/Pages/Talking-to-Children-About-Racial-Bias.aspx>

We must strive to be peacemakers ourselves.

We need to create safe spaces in our practices, hospitals and clinics for children and their families. In our own lives, we should all recognize our own implicit biases and remember that they do not make us bad people, just human beings. How we respond to our unconscious biases is what truly matters.

While eulogizing the police officers that were killed in Dallas a few weeks ago, former President Bush stated, “At our best, we practice empathy, imagining ourselves in the lives and circumstances of others. This is the bridge across our nation’s deepest divisions. And it is not merely a matter of tolerance, but of learning from the struggles and stories of our fellow citizens and finding our better selves in the process.”

The Minnesota Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics will continue to partner with families, community organizations, law enforcement and our state legislators to improve the lives of all children, especially those children whose lives face the most challenge as a result of poverty and any and all forms of intolerance.

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