



# Engaging Families

*Supporting Students From Cradle to Career*  
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206-607-1655 [Linda.Pauley@ed.gov](mailto:Linda.Pauley@ed.gov)

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Carrie Jasper, Editor Contributor:  
Cameron Brenchley  
Washington, DC 20202 Phone:  
202-401-1524  
Fax: 202-260-7956  
E-mail: [parent@ed.gov](mailto:parent@ed.gov)

## ED Regional Family Engagement Team

Olga Pirela  
Region I  
(CT, MA, ME, NH, RI, VT)  
POCH Building  
5 Post Office Square  
9th Floor, Room 24  
Boston, MA 02110  
617-289-0100  
[Olga.Pirela@ed.gov](mailto:Olga.Pirela@ed.gov)

Jonava Johnson  
Region IV  
(AL, FL, GA, KY, MS, NC, SC,  
TN)  
61 Forsyth St. S.W.,  
Suite 18T15  
Atlanta, GA 30303  
404-974-9450  
[Jonava.Johnson@ed.gov](mailto:Jonava.Johnson@ed.gov)

Shirley Jones  
Region V  
(IL, IN, MI, MN, OH, WI)  
500 W. Madison St.  
Suite  
1427 Chicago, IL  
60661  
312-730-1706  
[Shirley.Jones@ed.gov](mailto:Shirley.Jones@ed.gov)

Diana Huffman  
Region VIII  
(CO, MT, ND, SD, UT, WY)  
1244 Speer Blvd.,  
Suite 615  
Denver, CO 80204-3582  
303-844-3544  
[Diana.Huffman@ed.gov](mailto:Diana.Huffman@ed.gov)

Linda Pauley  
Region X (WA, OR, ID, AK)  
915 Second Ave.,  
Room  
3362 Seattle, WA  
98174

## Excerpt from a Message U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan Sent to all U.S. School Districts

All of us who work in education have broken hearts and are haunted by the tragedy visited on the educators, students, and families of the Newtown Public School District and Sandy Hook Elementary School. Whenever a school experiences violence and the lives of children and adults are lost, we struggle to find words to express our emotions and explain how this could have happened.

Schools are among the safest places for children and adolescents in our country, and, in fact, crime in schools has been trending downward for more than a decade. Nationwide statistics, however, provide little solace when 20 first-graders and six adults are senselessly gunned down in a small town's elementary school. Accounts from Sandy Hook indicate that the school's heroic principal and her staff had safety measures in place and had practiced their emergency procedures. As a result, children's lives were saved and an even greater tragedy was averted.

Not all tragedies can be prevented. But schools and districts need to be ready to handle crises, large and small, to keep our children and staff out of harm's way and ready to learn and teach, and to recover from such tragedies should they occur. As we reflect on what happened last week in Connecticut, I want to share some resources from the U.S. Department of Education's [Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center](#) that may be helpful to you and your team, now and in the future.

As hard as it is to talk among adults about such a tragedy, it can be even more difficult to talk with students and our own children. [Helping Youth and Children Recover from Traumatic Events](#) is a compilation of resources from the Department of Education, other federal agencies, and counseling experts. It is so important to give children the chance to talk, write, or draw to express their emotions. Please create the time and space for them to do that.

For school districts and schools, the Department also has several resources on [Creating and Updating School Emergency Management Plans](#). If you do have an emergency plan in place, please review it, update it as necessary, and practice that plan regularly. Knowing what to do when faced with a crisis can be the difference between calm and chaos.

The Department of Education's first priority is to help the Newtown community cope in the aftermath of this horrific event. In the days and weeks ahead, we will work with state and local officials, as well as Congress, to do everything in our power to help Newtown begin the long process of recovery.

## Family Engagement Team

The Office of Communications and Outreach family engagement specialists work with state and local education agencies to empower parents with the information and training they need to be full partners in the education and academic progress of their children. Serving as an information conduit, the team recognizes that parents need to be equipped with the tools necessary to make them informed partners and equal stakeholders in their children's education.

As President Obama said, our country has suffered through mass shootings and gun deaths of young people too many times, in too many places. As a nation, we must find the courage and the conviction to take meaningful action to prevent more tragedies – now.

As districts and school leaders take steps to prevent and prepare for possible emergencies in their community, they have my full support and deepest gratitude for taking on this difficult yet necessary work. To read the entire statement, go to <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/statement-us-secretary-education-arne-duncan-teachers-principals-and-school-administra> and view the video, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mPHcpNqylrc>.

## Resources for Parents Following Traumatic Events

Here at the Department of Education, as elsewhere throughout America, our hearts ache for the Newtown, Conn., community. In a letter today to school districts around the country, Secretary Arne Duncan noted that, “Whenever a school experiences violence and the lives of children and adults are lost, we struggle to find words to express our emotions and explain how this could have happened.”

Many parents and family friends are having a difficult time expressing their own feelings of anxiety, worry or sadness, and often we do not know how to talk with children about such a senseless and horrific tragedy.

Below is a list of resources specifically designed for parents and guardians to provide guidance on talking to children following a traumatic event.

For a complete list of resources visit ED's [Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools Technical Assistance Center](#), and read Secretary Duncan's "[Resources for Schools to Prepare for and Recover from Crisis](#)."

- [Tips for Adults on How to Talk with Children About Connecticut School Shooting](#) [PDF]
- [Helping Young Children and Families Cope with Trauma](#) (SAMHSA National Child Traumatic Stress Network) [PDF]  
Spanish - [Ayudando a Niños\(as\) y Familias a Enfrentarse con el Trauma](#) [PDF]
- [Childhood Traumatic Grief Educational Materials for Parents](#) (SAMHSA National Child Traumatic Stress Network) [PDF]
- [Tips for talking to children and youth after traumatic events: A guide for parents and educators](#) (SAMHSA) [PDF]
- [Parent Tips for Helping Infants and Toddlers after Disasters](#) (SAMHSA) [PDF]
- [Parent Tips for Helping Preschool-Age Children after Disasters](#) (SAMHSA) [PDF]
- [Parent Tips for Helping School-Age Children after Disasters](#) (SAMHSA) [PDF]
- [Parent Tips for Helping Adolescents after Disasters](#) (SAMHSA) [PDF]

For more information and to see documents in additional languages, visit <http://rems.ed.gov/HelpingYouthandChildrenRecoverFromTraumaticEvents.aspx>

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