

*Preparing for the  
Anniversary of 9/11  
And the Coming School Year*

*A Systems Approach to a Teachable Moment  
For Elementary Schools*

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***Welcome to a new school year!***

### **In This Guide You Will Find...**

In this guide, you will find suggestions for working with staff on preparedness for fall, for the 9/11 anniversary, and on setting school climate that fosters trust. There are three packets, one each for elementary schools, middle schools and high schools.

All follow the same format, and each one contains:

- a note for superintendents
- guidelines for principals
- activities for elementary teachers to use in their classrooms
- a template for a letter home to parents along with suggested activities for families to do together.

Although each set is designed for that particular level, you might find helpful ideas you'd like to adapt from the other packets. The format is the same, but the activities are very different. It might also be helpful for some to know what siblings in other levels might be doing.

### **On Our Web Site You Will Find...**

There is a wonderful little booklet, "A Summer of Renewal," on our web site that was written for teachers in New York. It was clear that the routine of the school year provided expectations that kept many going, but that the space of having summer in their lives might allow unresolved traumatic memories to surface. Some of the later chapters have ideas about working with students at the beginning of the year. Feel free to download a copy of that booklet if there are ideas you find useful.

**And...**

This entire packet is also available on our web site. (If you found this via web rather than the booklets that were distributed, you already know this!)

Although we don't want to think about it, the likelihood exists that we will face some kind of future terrorist attack somewhere in the country. Although that is not the focus of this guide, we wanted you to know that there is a link to a PDF file on the home page with information that would be helpful to you should that occur.

As with all kinds of responses, we are better off if we are prepared. Although it is not necessarily part of starting your school year, it is highly recommend that you take time to print those PDF pages out and file them in the place that will be most accessible when you need them.

Perhaps most important, remember that you may be forced to respond from somewhere in the building other than at your office. Take a moment to read the suggestions ahead of time, and let that be a beginning of a greater philosophy you will create around how you will respond in the heat of the moment.

Enough said.



## Introduction

After working this past year with the schools in Lower Manhattan who were most effected by the events of 9/11, it was clear that many were going into summer without having had the opportunity to really look at some of their own experiences and reactions. Because some realized that "it all might come crashing in" over the summer when they had more time to let their thoughts wander, we created a guide for teachers called "A Summer of Renewal." The weekly activities were designed to both encourage them to relax and celebrate the break, and also to take them back through examining some of their unresolved or unexamined trauma.

The next obvious project was looking at the start-up of school and the challenges it will bring for many. Like anniversaries of many major events, the anniversary of 9/11 will, for some, trigger deeper emotions to resurface. Because it comes so quickly after the beginning of the school year, we've put together a guide for school staff for that first week or two of the year. This is a guide for creating a positive climate in schools. There are some activities addressing the anniversary of 9/11 in a positive way, while taking advantage of the "teachable moment" it provides. But more critical, it sets the stage for creating trust, thus making each school a safe haven for students.

Events provide us "teachable moments." Whether we take advantage of them or not, we are still teaching students by our actions or lack of them. When we take time to talk about events and give students an opportunity to process them and give them meaning, students learn many positive things. They learn that we are interested in their well-being and that we not only engage their brains, but also their hearts...

This set is for elementary school, but we encourage you to glance through the middle and high school versions as well. There may be activities in those sections you'd like to adapt. Also take time to look over the family portion...

## A Special note to Superintendents

This has actually been prepared for principals, teachers, and counselors, for use at the building level. It also has a community component that allows the school to be a resource to parents. Please feel free to download and copy any of the materials that will be helpful, putting them in the hands of your building principals, teachers, and counselors.



## Introduction for Principals

This packet was created with you in mind, as the instructional leader of your site. Each year when you open your building you have new staff and students and new challenges. This packet provides resource information for your teachers and counselors and suggestions for your parents for the anniversary of 9/11 and other related activities that go on during the year, using the anniversary of 9/11 as the kick-off. Please feel free to modify any of the materials. Parent letters will need to be edited and put onto your letterhead. We ask that you leave the footers at the bottom of other pages you distribute to teachers and parents.

As principal you'll be coordinating the opening assembly. These activities could be coordinated with acknowledgement of the upcoming anniversary of 9/11, or you may wish to hold an assembly specifically on 9/11. Decisions on this will vary greatly based on your proximity to the event and whether students or staff in your buildings suffered losses on 9/11.

The purpose of these assemblies is to build community and help students and staff realize that as we look back on this past year, we have reasons for hope based on community support and how we support each other.

Moments of silence or memorial assemblies sometimes work against the positive energy that we need during this next school year. You'll see that our activities focus on developing and understanding the incident of 9/11 but also on creating and reinforcing the sense that your school is a safe haven for students.

Your opening staff meeting this year provides an opportunity for you and your staff to focus on the anniversary of 9/11 and its impact on children, your community and your staff. There may be some activities listed in the teacher's section that you'll like to do with your staff. If you decide to photocopy pages and hand them out to the staff, that would be a natural lead-in to a discussion you might have.

Doing one activity with your staff at your opening meeting would set the stage and provide a model for the teachers sensitivity and direction, assisting them as they go on to create this for their students.

Many times the best intentions of teachers can raise anxiety in children. The hope is that this packet will help focus your teachers' energy, creativity and passion around teaching and compassion, using this anniversary as an opportunity. Take ten minutes and do one of these activities at your staff meeting.



## Circles of Support for Staff

Copy off the PDF file of concentric circles. Each person puts his or her own name in the center circle. On the second space out, they list as many people as they'd like who are their closest support people. Encourage them to include people from work. In the next space out are the support people who are one level further out, and so on.

After they've had just a few minutes to put names in all of the circles to represent their support system, suggest that they think about a time when something happened that either moved new people into the inner circle, or moved some from the inner circle further out.

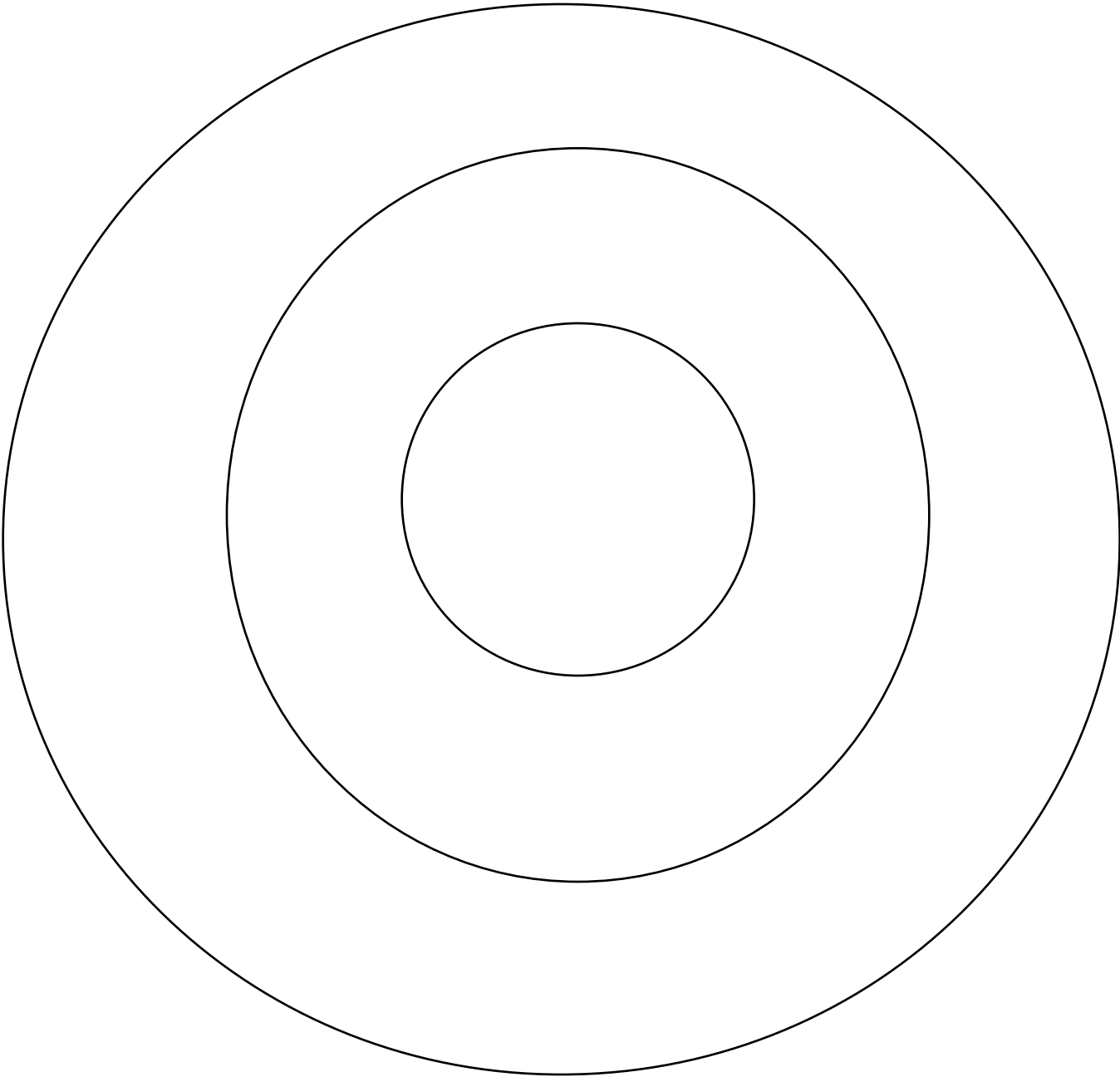
In doing this exercise with some of the teachers in Lower Manhattan who had been profoundly effected by 9/11, they saw that because of the magnitude of the event, some of their co-workers had moved into their inner most circle. Some of their family members who did not live in Manhattan and who didn't actually experience that event were now further out in their network of support.

This is an invitation for staff to acknowledge the change that 9/11 brought about if they happened to be personally impacted by that, or to see that other events in our lives change our support networks as well. It is also an opportunity as you introduce new staff to your existing faculty to help them realize that, within a year, these new faces may become part of their support network as they build team relationships and friendships.

When debriefing the exercise with the whole group, you might ask existing staff what difference it would make if they couldn't have any co-workers in their diagram. Point out that this is what it is like for new staff, and encourage them to realize the importance of reaching out to the new staff.



Circles of Support



## Suggestions for Elementary School Principals

You are in a unique and wonderful position to encourage your teachers to creatively use the anniversary of 9/11 as a "teachable moment" and to set the tone in your building as a "Safe Haven." In this guide you will find ideas for teachers and schools, letters you might amend to send home to parents, and things they might do to mitigate the effects of 9/11. Your counselor may provide additional ideas and insights to take you further than we've done in this guide.

You might begin by having a staff meeting before students come to school. Choose a school-wide slogan or expression that sets the tone for your school to become or continue to be a Safe Haven for students. Teachers will use this as the basis for helping their students come up with a slogan that expresses their identity as a classroom community. Look for ways to teach and reach students with this concept, and make signs, flags, class shields or bulletin boards with it displayed as well.

There are special things you could do with your staff at staff meetings. Just as you want your teachers to nurture your students, this is your opportunity to support them as well, sharing information from this packet or other means for supporting them in addressing the 9/11 anniversary.

Plan to have a school-wide assembly as soon as the year begins -- before 9/11. Options for this assembly:

- Have each class do some kind of presentation of what they've come up with for a slogan, or something the class wants to do for performance, for recognition, or to explain their identity as a class community. These presentations can be short, but give each class the sense of importance of their own class as well as fitting into a larger community.
- If you don't have a school mascot, you might pick one or have students pick one before the assembly. You could have poster contests or other activities around the mascot.
- Take time to recognize youth who have succeeded at something unusual. Instead of having only a focus on who has done well academically and athletically, include youth who have done things entirely outside the school focus. This could include youth who have participated in the county fair showing animals or any number of things that are often overlooked by schools. The goal is to recognize a broader field of gifts.
- Have teachers teach their students a few songs that you can all sing together at assemblies. Singing together is something so many students enjoy! If you have a music teacher s/he could help with this, providing words for the teachers and perhaps tapes of the music for kids to sing along with. End all of your school assemblies with familiar songs.

Compose a letter to go home to parents telling them what you plan to do to create the trust in your school as a Safe Haven for their children. Consider inviting them to the assembly, or perhaps having a parent gathering prior to or on 9/11. Remember, the focus doesn't have to be on the events of 9/11, but could be an entirely uplifting gathering that reaffirms a sense of community.

Consider having an art project that somehow involves the whole school. One idea would be to get clay to make tiles, and have each child decorate a tile that will go onto a wall somewhere. You might choose only a few colors so there is a color theme going through the design. You might find a wall that could become a mural, and an art teacher or artist willing to help all students participate in creating a huge mural with a theme. Or you could help students create a mosaic.

You might consider having all students and staff in the school participate in a "Hands Are Not For Hurting" project. See the separate information sheet on that project.

Do activities that bring together young students with those a few years older, such as first and fourth graders (K/3, 1/4, 2/5, 3/6). Some activities and projects could focus on:

- What would help younger kids feel safe from bigger kids on the playground and on the bus?
- Suggesting that the older students come up with creative ways of helping the younger students with problem-solving ideas or coping skills.

Have teachers go to each other's rooms to do activities with different grades. Keep the same buddy class for one whole quarter or half of the year so kids get to know each other. Following this is a template for a letter to parents, then guidelines for counselors, and for teachers for activities in the classroom.



(Your school letterhead here)

*This is offered assuming you will have to amend it depending on your activities and decisions.  
To be used, taking off copyright information at the bottom, sent as your own.  
Remainder of the package needs footer left in tact.*

(Date)

Dear Parent:

As we celebrate the beginning of the new school year, we also face the anniversary of the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> last year. We wanted to share with you the thoughts and plans we have for making that time meaningful, yet uplifting for our students.

We recognize that students were impacted by the events of 9/11 in varying degrees. We also can expect that, as the day approaches, we will begin to have a great deal of news coverage of the event, including film footage of the downing of the towers and other troubling scenes.

Mental health professionals who work with children and youth caution us about how deeply bothered children can become from watching events that were terrorizing for victims. We encourage you to carefully monitor your children's viewing of coverage, and perhaps consider alternatives for helping them give meaning to 9/11.

Included with this letter is a list of suggestions for families. It includes activities you might do as a family and discussion starters for how you might talk with your children and help them come to terms with what has happened. Often if children don't bring up the subject, we want to think that they're doing fine. But children are apt to wait for us to bring it up. They sometimes read our silence on a subject as a message that it is not open for discussion.

At (name of) School, we have planned for the anniversary on both a classroom and a school-wide basis. Teachers have been encouraged to spend some time each day on activities that are specifically chosen to help our students get to know each other quickly, to begin to gain trust, and to have a sense of identity within their own classroom as their own smaller community within the school.

In addition to the classroom activities, we will be having a school-wide assembly. Although much of the country will focus on patriotism, we plan to bring the focus closer to home for the students. Our goal with this gathering will be to reinforce their sense of community with their classrooms, and then to establish a greater trust in the school as their very own "safe haven." Each classroom will do something that speaks of their theme or a catchy expression they've chosen. We will also do some whole group activities, including singing a few songs that we'll sing each time we're all together all year. (If you wish to invite parents to attend, mention that here, or if you're having a parent gathering, mention that.)

We hope you'll let us know of your concerns, your needs, or how we might support you and your children during this school year. (Counselor's name) is our counselor and s/he'd be happy to work with you if your child is particularly effected by the events of 9/11. We look forward to building a great working relationship with you as our year together unfolds.

Warm regards,

\_\_\_\_\_, Principal



## Suggestions for Families For the Upcoming Anniversary of September 11<sup>th</sup>

Once you turn off the television, you'll have lots more time for meaningful interaction. First let's look at some discussion starters. Here's a concept that is often very helpful. If we ask kids, "Are you worried?" they often deny it, even though they are. But if we **state** that children are often worried, and ask them what kinds of worries children have, it does two things. It states an obvious fact. Some children worry. And it is not confronting them -- we aren't saying whether **they** have fears, just that **some** have fears. So here are some discussion starters and thoughts.

When talking with children, for it to be helpful for them, we really need to do much more listening than talking. Resist the temptation to have instant answers that you hope will take away their pain or fear. Instead, begin with a stating something simple and obvious. "The anniversary of September 11<sup>th</sup> is coming up. I'm thinking that kids will be thinking about it more right now. What have you thought about it?" ... and then... just listen! Again, **resist** the temptation to have instant answers.

Allow a little time for silence. Really listen to their responses, and just sit until another "statement of observation" comes up for you. The next one might be, "Last year, some kids had fears or bad dreams. What kinds of things do you think kids your age might have had?" Notice that we aren't confronting the child by making them "own" their fears. We're simply acknowledging that they probably know what kids their age would be worried about. Of course, what they're likely to tell you about will be their own fears, because that is their frame of reference.

As they voice their fears, you might simply ask, "What could we do that would help you with that?" rather than always coming up with the answers. Sometimes what kids come up with will help them more than our ideas because it really addresses exactly their own fears.

Some other great questions include:

"What do you wish adults understood about how this is for you?"

"What are some of the things you've learned this past year?"

"Where do you go in the house when you want to feel safe?"

"Where do you go in your head when you want to feel safe?"

"Who are the people you know you can talk to about just almost anything?"

Be sure that a major part of your time in discussion has a very uplifting and positive focus. Revisit some of the fun things you did as a family over the year. Look through a picture album together. Make a date for again within the next few days for another time together, and every other time, have the major focus on the positives. Ask questions like, "What has gone well today (or this week)?" "At those times, you might just make one mention of your last discussion by saying that you found this one thing that your child said that was meaningful and perhaps mentioning that you've been thinking about that. You might make a real effort to begin each time together by having family members share something for which they are grateful in general, and then something they are appreciating that someone else in the family has done for them in the past few days.

As you see the benefit of having these special times together, it might be a nice addition to start a family journal that everyone writes or draws in as you wrap up your discussion time. Even a couple of sentences each time from each person would give you all lots to look back on over time.



## Activities for Families

These activities are not age specific, and all can be adapted to a more mature or younger child as needed. When writing is indicated, try drawing for younger kids. Actually, it is often much more revealing to have older kids draw than they might think! We can hide lots in choosing our words carefully, but there is sometimes much revealed in our art. **Begin each time together with a check-in.** An example of that might be for each person to tell one thing that troubles him or her and one that gives him or her hope.

**Family Lifeline:** This can be an individual or a group activity. Use long paper if you have it, or tape together smaller pieces so the line can be a few feet long -- at least three, and better if more. The lifeline can begin many places -- with Mom and Dad's marriage, or for each individual, with birth. Then significant events are written or symbolized in art along the line where they would fit if the line were divided evenly chronologically. If doing a single line for the whole family, be sure all have the chance to come up with significant events and record them. As you do this, 9/11 may or may not come up. As the parent, you may decide to bring it up and put it on the line, or you may choose for this to be an experience that only displays what the kids come up with. If you do want to open discussion about how they're doing with 9/11, that would be an easy way to do so. But whatever you choose is fine. Sometimes we do a lifeline that goes on a few years and we put on our dreams and goals. Sometimes people put the positives in one color and the negatives in another. Or the positives above the line and the challenges below. Sometimes the symbols people draw for events are much more powerful than simply writing the word. Be as creative as you like about this.

**Circles of support:** Each person gets a piece of paper that has perhaps four circles, one inside the next, all evenly spaced from a small one-inch circle in the center to one that is within an inch of the edges of the paper. In the very center circle, each person writes his/her own name. Then in the space between the next lines, write the name of the people you most depend on when times are tough. Who can you talk to? Who can you always depend on? And the next ring out are people who are supportive, but not quite so close, and so on with each ring out. When everyone is done adding names, take turns talking about why some people are closer in than others. A follow-up to this might be to have each person look at their names and determine which of them have moved in or out in the past year, and what might have prompted that change.

**A Map of My Journey:** This activity has lots of possibilities. It can be the "Map of My Journey Through Grief" or "...Through challenges" or "... Through life" or anything else you come up with. But this is an opportunity for youth to see the coping skills they've gained while facing adversity. The first part of the activity is for each person to simply draw their map or journey through grief or loss or transition or whatever. Then after everyone is done with the maps, each person can share with others what their journey was, and at each of the challenge points, there is the opportunity to name or write in what was learned in that situation. Relative to 9/11, some may put that event as a life challenge and some may not, but this will also be an opportunity for family members to each talk about why they did or didn't.

**The Gratitude Book:** A book is only one way, but find some way of having each person in the family record something for which they are grateful each day. Or it could be a gratitude collage if you can hang a large piece of paper on the wall that can stay up for some time. The goal is to have people be in touch every day with an attitude of gratitude.

**Help your child write a thank you note to your own local fire fighters or police.** You could take this opportunity to help your youngster realize that there are lots of people who help keep us safe, or help us out when we especially need it. You might choose other kinds of community support people instead of fire or police, but the connection to be made here is how people help take care of each other.

**Something We Can Do:** This is a time to begin to look outward. Whatever our life circumstance, it is likely we can look at someone whose life has challenges we'd rather not face. As a family, make a commitment to go together to do something for someone or a group or organization that could use help. Use this as a time to build a sense of character, as a time to touch in with community, as a time to reaffirm that "We all live in the shelter of one another."



## Suggestions for Elementary School Counselors

You are in a terrific position to influence the school staff in using the anniversary of 9/11 as a "teachable moment." Additionally, you are more likely than most to have insights regarding the special needs of high risk students and those whose lives might be jarred by these kinds of events or those who sustain losses.

Look over the suggestions for principals. There may be ways you can support the principal in organizing the time set aside at a staff meeting for acknowledging changes in their lives since 9/11.

**Some of the possible goals you might have over the first week with your principal** could be to:

- Provide an activity for a few moments of focus for staff on how their own network of support shifts from time to time, and may have been effected by the events of 9/11 or other events in their lives. (Use the one we've provided or supply one you like better.)
- Support your principal in creating an understanding among staff in how they might use the "teachable moment" provided by the anniversary of 9/11 to create an environment of tolerance and understanding.

**Ways you might support staff** might include:

- Taking advantage of this opportunity to sensitize staff to the needs of students and give handouts on recognizing depression.
- Helping staff amend activities in this guide, or help them create their own which will raise awareness in students and provide opportunity to learn new coping skills.
- Helping teachers provide moments in their classrooms to normalize students' reactions to traumatic events, whether national or personal in nature.

**And with parents:**

- Read the suggested letter to go home to parents. Take this time to add to the letter any suggestions you might have or add an additional sheet to be sent home.
- Consider whether it would be helpful to add the handouts provided in this guide or others you may have to the back of the letter home to parents.

**In other ways:**

- Look for links to web sites or tips you might add to your school's web site.

Take a few moments to look through your own journals, magazines and publications for articles that might be helpful for school staff or parents. Consider taking a few tips from several of them to put into the student newspaper. See whether your local paper would do a short column on tips for parents based on information you provide for them.

You already know the students who are most likely to be impacted by this anniversary or future events. Take a moment to think about how you might reach out to them as soon as school starts to reinforce your relationship with them.

**And on September 11<sup>th</sup>:**

It would seem appropriate that on the actual anniversary, the guidance office have a more active role, perhaps having some food or snacks out for people to stop by and talk informally. Create a bit of an invitation to drop by. Some people may be surprised at how much the anniversary brings up, and many could be most comfortable talking informally with you.

At the end of this guide, two PDFs have been included which you might find helpful. You can print them out and copy them as long as you leave the copyright information at the bottom of all pages. One is on signs of depression and the other is a series of questions you can ask students which may help you discover whether they are suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

You could check our web site at <[www.cmionline.org](http://www.cmionline.org)> for manuals and workbooks that contain information on trauma and dealing with students in the aftermath of catastrophic events.



## Suggestions for Elementary School Teachers

Depending on how close you are to New York or Washington DC, or whether you have students or staff who had loved ones on one of the airplanes, you are likely to have students in your classes who have varying levels of fear, sadness, emptiness or very little reaction at all to the events of 9/22 and the upcoming anniversary.

This year, as school begins and the anniversary arrives quickly, so take the time to create a unity in your classroom early on. Think ahead of time about what you might do so students in your class have a sense of belonging. For elementary students, you might have beaded bracelets, matching pins or something that "shows" that they can wear and identify easily that they, along with others in your class, all belong together. Have something that is from you on that very first day.

Also on the first day, you might help your students pick a theme or slogan that represents what they want the classroom to be... it might relate to being a safe place, or a caring place, or fun -- but find ways for all students to participate in the creation of the theme or slogan. Thoughts:

- Ways we all need each other
- Ways we like to be treated

The second day, you might have an art activity that enables them to all make something that is similar or matches or goes along with the slogan. This could be a class flag or shield. It would be great if all classes decide to do flags or all classes decide to do shields so there is a theme throughout the school that brings them together yet gives each class individual identity. Consider having your flags up in the windows so the outside world can see your work. Are there other ways you can think of having their ideas become known by the larger community? Would someone give you one billboard that could have some of the slogans up for awhile?

### Coat of Arms:

Consider topics such as:

- What I do to stay healthy
- Biggest challenge I've overcome in my life
- Important people in my family that provide me support
- People in our community that I depend on

Involve students in **writing poetry, haiku, or letters** around their classroom theme and how they connect with others:

- Topics for pictures or writing in journals
  - People who have made me feel welcome
  - Times a group has helped me feel connected
- Bring in senior citizens, or incorporate a larger community in some other ways

There is a **wonderful book** by Jimmy Buffet and his daughter Savannah Jane, about Trouble Dolls. This is a book based on one culture's use of tiny dolls that you tell your troubles to and they will work on handling your difficulties so you can sleep. Reading that book and then having students make their own tiny trouble dolls could be wonderful. The reports back from students who actually used them and loved having them was incredibly rewarding for one teacher who did this shortly after 9/11 last year.

Invite students to **develop a handshake** that is just their own. Incorporate ways to use it all year.



Have students create a dance or some kind of movement that represents something that is about your class theme, or about some other kind of peaceful statements, such as:

- Ways students can help newcomers feel welcome.
- A time I appreciated a group that found a way to include me.
- Standing up for someone who is being picked on

Have students in your classroom **create a crossword puzzle** that uses words that have to do with kindness, peace, etc. Consider teaming with another classroom and give each other your creation to solve. Or do word searches in grids and exchange them.

Any of these concepts can be adapted to a **bulletin board** that is in the room or hallway, so kids are reminded of it often. The word search or completed crossword puzzle could be blown up so others see it.

Create your **special calendar** for each month. Plan one special activity or event that focuses on what helps kids feel connected. Engage the students in coming up with ideas around "What are four activities we do (one each week) this month that helps us feel connected?"

**Twenty questions...** "In this box I have something that always makes me happy or makes me feel good (written on paper inside)." Others get to ask 20 questions to see if they can guess what it is. You could do this several times during the year, including ideas such as:

- Something that always makes me happy.
- My favorite thing about our class.
- Something someone in our class did that I appreciate.
- (toward the end of the year) My favorite class activity this year.

Even in the fall, you can **plant things** that will grow -- consider tulips or something that will come up in the spring. This is about hope and future.

Involve your **art and music teachers** in any of these activities in ways that will be much more creative. They might also take your theme further in their classes as well.



## Suggestions for Elementary School Principals

You are in a unique and wonderful position to encourage your teachers to use the anniversary of 9/11 as a "teachable moment" and to set the tone in your building as a "Safe Haven." Your building counselor may provide excellent ideas for amending any of these or taking you further than our ideas here.

You might begin by having a staff meeting before students come to school. Choose a school-wide slogan or expression that sets the tone for your school to become or continue to be a Safe Haven for students. Teachers will use this as the basis for helping their students come up with a slogan that expresses their identity as a classroom community. Look for ways to teach and reach students with this concept, and make signs, flags, class shields or bulletin boards with it displayed as well.

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- If you don't have a school mascot, you might pick one or have students pick one before the assembly. You could have poster contests or other activities around the mascot.
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Compose a letter to go home to parents telling them what you plan to do to create the trust in your school as a Safe Haven for their children. Consider inviting them to the assembly, or perhaps having a parent gathering prior to or on 9/11. Remember, the focus doesn't have to be on the events of 9/11, but could be an entirely uplifting gathering that reaffirms a sense of community.

Consider having an art project that somehow involves the whole school. One idea would be to get clay to make tiles, and have each child decorate a tile that will go onto a wall somewhere. You might choose only a few colors so there is a color theme going through the design. You might find a wall that could become a mural, and an art teacher or artist willing to help all students participate in creating a huge mural with a theme. Or you could help students create a mosaic.

You might consider having all students and staff in the school participate in a "Hands Are Not For Hurting" project. See the separate information sheet on that project.

Do inter grade activities ( K/3, 1/4, 2/5, 3/6) that bring two classes together to do some projects. Some activities could focus on:

- What would help younger kids feel safe from bigger kids on the playground and on the bus?
- Suggesting that the older students come up with creative ways of helping the younger students with problem-solving ideas or coping skills.

Have teachers go to each other's rooms to do activities with different grades. Keep the same buddy class for one whole quarter or half of the year so kids get to know each other.



## Hands Are Not For Hurting

This is a wonderful project to integrate into your school start-up every year. No matter what programs you already have in place on violence prevention, nothing in this will be at odds with your current programs. There are some special things this adds in terms of school climate.

There are several steps and endless possibilities to how this can be done. In general, the process is this:

1. Students have some kind of assembly or presentation that sensitizes them to the plight of others, the destructive force of violence or some related theme.
2. Later in their classrooms, students hear about a pledge they can take to promise not to use their hands or words for hurting themselves or others.
3. They trace around their own hand (or someone helps them) and they cut it out, sign it, and sign their pledge.
4. All hands, including the teacher's, the principal's and other staff people who participate, are glued to a black background; the poster is laminated and hung in each classroom or in the hallway just outside the door of the classroom.
5. Pledges can be sent home with a note to parents so they will all talk together about the meaning of the pledge and how it becomes a foundation for classroom environment.

Variations and additions to the theme:

1. Ask your mayor to declare a town or city wide "Hands Are Not For Hurting" day.
  - S/he and his/her staff will take the pledge, cut out their hands and create a poster like the school's to be hung at city hall.
  - Service clubs, civic organizations and others encourage businesses and agencies to do this same activity with their staff as a sign of support to the school's concept.
  - Get billboards in town to donate a few months (especially right at the beginning of the school year) to have the "Hands" logo and slogan posted. Find an organization to have a city bus painted with the symbol and slogan.
2. Invite your hospital to become involved:
  - As parents come in for a birth, they walk past the postings of parents from the past few months.
  - After their child is born, the mother and father (if present) they trace around their hands on a placemat-sized pledge card that has room for the two adult hands and a tiny hand down between them.
3. Extend the concept to churches, synagogues and temples, Boys and Girls Clubs, day care and after school programs and other places students gather. Some may take the pledge with several different groups, which is great.
4. Have a poster contest to develop a special hand symbol that will be used by your community, or a poster that incorporates the hand in the Hands Are Not For Hurting Project and has some blank space below the symbol with room for writing a message. Ask local businesses to put the poster in their window with an offer for families who have taken the pledge at home, such as 15% off pizza for whole families together on Tuesday nights, or books on peace and social skills for kids or parenting skills 15% off. If their merchandise doesn't lend itself to this kind of deal, ask them to have a drawing or raffle -- like a travel agent that would let families sign up and one is drawn for a free weekend stay somewhere.
5. Have students work on a special design that could be screened onto t-shirts to be given away at assemblies to students who have done something noteworthy at school or elsewhere toward the interests of peace making, conflict resolution or related good works.
6. Ask students to come up with ideas on how they could incorporate the hand and the pledge concept in ways we haven't come up with yet.

Visit the web site at [www.handsproject.org](http://www.handsproject.org) for more ideas and information on this activity.



## Identifying Depression in Students

Depression is more common among students than most school staff realize. Especially with elementary aged children, we tend not to think about them even having the capacity to be depressed.

There are a variety of ways students try to manage on their own. Because they have no other frame of reference, they usually simply try to manage, thinking that this is normal.

With younger children, it is important for us to watch for signs and refer students about whom we are concerned. It is very unusual for an elementary aged child to self-report feelings of depression. But often teachers are the people who would be able to notice the behaviors in children and work toward getting them the help they need.

Here are some things to watch for:

- Difficulty sleeping
- Tired in class much of the time
- Sleeping all of the time
- Withdrawal from friends
- Weight loss or weight gain
- Appetite loss or gain
- Getting into trouble -- rebellion to get attention

Depression is a metabolic dysfunction in the brain, so discipline isn't going to change that imbalance. Medication is effective and safe, but it is essential that the physician prescribing medication for depression be specialized in managing this challenging condition.

Sometimes we tend to minimize their statements and when students tell us they're depressed, we may respond with something like, "Oh, we all get the blues." We need to ask questions to find out how long they've felt that way, and how much these feelings permeate their days. If it lasts for more than two weeks, seek help. Signs include:

- Depressed mood for most of the day
- Measurable loss in enjoyment of usual
- Inability to stay awake or fall asleep
- Restlessness and slowed body movement
- Fatigue
- Feelings of worthlessness and guilt most days
- Inability to think clearly
- Continued thoughts of suicide or suicide attempt

These are some of the signs of depression, and it is the responsibility of clinicians or physicians to make the diagnosis. Our job is to recognize and refer these students. It can change their lives!



## THE TRAUMA CHECKLIST

*Answer the following questions relative to whether this seems to have changed since the tragedy or crisis that recently occurred.*

- \_\_\_\_\_ Are you have trouble doing on school work since the event?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do nightmares of the event wake you up at night? Dreams you can't remember but that wake you up with a sense of alarm?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do pictures come to mind when you're thinking about something else, interrupting what you are thinking about?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Are you feeling like you really have to "watch out?? (Like you're always waiting for something else bad to happen, so you have to really stay alert.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do sirens or other noises, smells, or sights make you think about what happened?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you still like to eat breakfast and lunch? Are you eating well?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Are you very tired, sleeping lots more or wanting to?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you still like to go out to play and run? Do you have lots of energy
- \_\_\_\_\_ Are you as happy as you used to be?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Is there anyone else whom you might think might be having trouble with any of these things? If so, whom?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Are there other things that seem different for you since the event? If so, what?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Is there anyone you are talking about this with?

