

## **Tips on Responding to the Newtown School District Shootings**

*Prepared by NSPRA Past President Jim Dunn, APR*

I encourage you not to underestimate the emotional impact this may have on parents and students in your district. Killing small children is crossing a new line. Some considerations as you prepare your response:

- First, people (students, staff, parents, community members) will need reassurance that their children are safe at school.
- Local districts might need to get their crisis plans ready for parents to review, and have a list of the current safety procedures in place at each school.
- In addition, be ready to confirm the dates when emergency procedures were last reviewed or practiced. (Show you are aware and care)
- Districts should provide a phone number for worried parents to call to get information about school safety procedures.
- Remind your patrons that the most important thing to keep children safe is a caring community that lets school officials know if there are ANY concerns. (Provide the number to call or the email address).
- A message on the district website might say something like this:

“Our prayers and thoughts are with the people of Sandy Hook School and its surrounding communities. Our entire school family grieves the loss of life and innocence as a result of this morning’s shootings. The first and most important priority of our school district is the safety of students and staff. We call upon our entire school community to renew its efforts to keep children safe by reporting any safety concerns to school officials. Our children are our most precious resource, and our hearts are broken today. Please know, children may need extra care and support if/as they become aware of today’s events.

“Here is what your school district is doing today:

- All counselors, teachers, administrators and staff are encouraged to give each other an extra measure of support.
- All safety procedures are being reviewed with a goal to do everything possible to keep children and staff from harm.
- We are renewing our efforts to collaborate with local community agencies to create a united effort aimed at school safety.
- We are directly asking our entire school community to renew its efforts to help us keep our children and schools safe.”

- Finally: this could be an important moment to use social media by texting or posting on facebook messages of concern and safety procedures. People may want to respond with their own messages of love and concern.