

## Statement regarding January 13, 2018

In consideration of Hawai`i's false alarm event on Saturday January 13, 2018, the Hawai`i Association of School Psychologists (HASP) believes adults may find the following suggestions and resources helpful in aiding children to understand and manage their reactions to the event.

Although the events were considered an accident and there was no real threat to the state of Hawai`i, the threat of war and terrorism is increasingly discussed in the local and national media and our schools practice shelter in place drills and have emergency preparedness plans for attacks. As a result, Hawai`i's keiki may be more aware of events that could be considered frightening or upsetting.

### All Adults Should:

1. **Model calm and control.** Children take their emotional cues from the significant adults in their lives. Avoid appearing anxious or frightened. How adults express their emotions will influence the reactions of children.
2. **Reassure children they are safe** and (if true) so are the important adults and other loved ones in their lives. Point out factors that help ensure their immediate safety and that of their community.
3. **Remind them trustworthy people are in charge.** Explain that many authorities are working to ensure that false alarms like this do not happen again.
4. **Let children know it is okay to feel upset.** Explain all feelings are okay when something upsetting or frightening occurs. Let children talk about their feelings and help put them into perspective.
5. **Stick to the facts.** Explain that a mistake was made, and safeguards are being put in place to prevent another false alarm.
6. **Keep your explanations developmentally appropriate.** Let children's questions guide responses. **Early elementary school** children need brief, simple information that should be balanced with reassurances that the daily structures of their lives will not change. *Upper elementary and early middle school* children will be more vocal in asking questions about whether they truly are safe. *Upper middle school and high school* students may have strong and varying opinions about the causes of threats to safety in schools and society. **For all children, encourage them to verbalize their thoughts and feelings. Be a good listener!**
7. **Observe children's reactions.** Depending on their age, children may not express their concerns verbally. Changes in behavior, appetite, and sleep patterns can also indicate a child's level of anxiety or discomfort. Children will express their emotions differently. Also, as individual perceptions of an experience vary, it is important that adults (caregivers in both home and school settings) take care not to over or under-respond to what a child may (or may not) be going through.
8. **Be aware of children at greater risk.** Children who have a connection to this particular event, have had a past traumatic experience or personal loss, suffer from depression or other mental illness, or with special needs may be at greater risk for severe reactions than others. Seek the help of a mental health professional if you are at all concerned.
9. **Keep lines of communication open between home and school.** Parents should let their child's teacher or school mental health professional know if they have concerns or feel their child may need extra support.
10. **Review family and school emergency plans.** Be sure all students know what to do and where to go in an emergency either at home or school. Establish a family meeting place.

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### **Additional Resources:**

Trauma: Brief Tips and Facts for Families and Educators <http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/trauma>

Managing Strong Reactions to Traumatic Events <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/trauma/managing-strong-emotional-reactions-to-traumatic-events-tips-for-families-and-teachers>

Care for the Caregiver: Tips for Families and Educators <http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/care-for-caregivers-tips-for-families-and-educators>

Building Resilience: Helping Children Weather Tough Times <http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/mental-health/prevention-and-wellness-promotion/building-resiliency-helping-children-learn-to-weather-tough-times>

Supporting Children's Mental Health: Tips for Families and Educators <http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/mental-health/prevention-and-wellness-promotion/supporting-childrens-mental-health-tips-for-parents-and-educators-x38466>

**Adapted with permission from *Helping Children Cope With Terrorism - Tips for Families and Educators* (National Association of School Psychologists) <http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/war-and-terrorism/helping-children-cope-with-terrorism>**