



PRESCHOOLERS AND THE NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION AGAINST GUN VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS ON APRIL 20

by Dr. Nancy Carlsson-Paige

Students, parents, teachers and citizens from across the country will participate in the National Day of Action Against Gun Violence in Schools on April 20th. Preschoolers and their parents can be part of this day, too.

For younger children, the emphasis of the day should be a positive one—we march to make sure that schools are safe and fun places for everyone. Parents can emphasize that we don't want guns to be in schools or any place where there are children.

Young children see the world in concrete terms, and they need to have a sense of safety and security. We can emphasize to them that we are marching on this day is to keep them and all children safe. Seeing all the people who are marching for the same thing can feel very empowering to a child. She can begin to feel the strength and inspiration that comes from social action.

Young kids will enjoy any concrete activities that we can offer to them around this day of action. Many will like making signs. We can give them markers and poster paper, scissors, construction paper and glue, and help them draw or make a simple sign to carry.

There will be some young children on this day of action who spend some of their play time in good guy/bad guy play, maybe even using pretend guns. The meaning of this day could confuse those children or make them feel guilty for a kind of play they really like. Parents can acknowledge the difference between "real" guns and "pretend" ones, emphasizing that real guns can hurt people, but that pretend ones don't. For more information on this complicated topic, see *The War Play Dilemma* by Diane Levin and Nancy Carlsson-Paige.

It's hard to protect children completely from hearing about real world violence, and some will have heard something about mass school shootings. Making sense of what they hear about violence in the world can be confusing for children. One of the best means they have for making sense of what they have heard is through pretend

play. We can encourage and support children's play, and we can watch carefully for signs of what any given child might be expressing as their play. For guidelines on supporting play and listening and talking with children about violence in the news, please see [GUIDELINES FOR "When the World Is a Dangerous Place: Caring for Children in Violent Times"](#) by Dr. Diane Levin.