

Dealing With Anti-Asian Sentiments After Virginia Tech Tragedy

The shooting of 32 students on the campus of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University by a Korean-American student has caused many in the Asian-American community, particularly those in the Korean community, to fear a backlash.

Hours after the gunman's identity had been revealed, messages of hate against Asian-Americans and immigrants began appearing on blogs and Internet forums.

Anti-Defamation League (ADL) National Director Abraham H. Foxman said in a statement on the organization's Web site, "Extremists are using the Virginia Tech shootings to spread a message of hate against immigrants, particularly Asians."

According to the ADL, some people are focusing on the ethnicity of the gunman in an attempt to blame Asians and immigrants for the deaths and to spread a message of hate.

It is important to remember not to direct feelings of hate at a specific race or ethnic group because of the wrongful actions of one individual member of that group.

What you can do

The Massachusetts Governor's Task Force on Hate Crimes offers the following advice to Asian-Americans and members of other ethnic groups who fear they may be targets of discrimination or hate crimes:

- Continue daily routines as much as normal.
- If you feel you need to, do things that make you feel safer, such as changing your routes and traveling in groups.
- Remember that citizens and residents of the United States have a right to exercise their faith, live according to their cultural traditions and wear religiously distinctive clothing.
- Become an educator about your religion and culture to local schools, community groups and colleges.

Suggestions for parents

- Check into your child's school policies on harassment and bullying.
- Ask your school to explain its response plan for racially motivated bullying or harassment.
- Join or help found a parents' task force on school safety.
- With a smaller child, explain the concepts of bullying and teasing.
- Be honest and answer all your child's questions.
- Warn your child of potential harassment.
- Develop an action plan to get to your child to safety if attacked. Encourage your child to report any incident to a teacher, administrator or safety officer.

Support victims

Tolerance.org offers these suggestions to combat hate and to support victims of hate crimes and discrimination:

- **Support the victim(s).** Hate-crime victims are especially vulnerable, fearful and alone. If you're a victim, report every incident—in detail—and ask for help. If you learn about a hate crime in your community, show support. Let victims know you care. Surround them with comfort and protection.
- **Create an alternative.** Find other outlets for anger and frustration.
- **Teach tolerance.** Bias is learned early, usually at home. Schools can offer lessons of tolerance and acceptance. Reach out to young people who may be susceptible to prejudice.

- **Dig deeper.** Look inside yourself for prejudices and stereotypes. Build your own cultural competency, then keep working to expose discrimination wherever it happens—in housing, employment, education and more.

Promote diversity in the workplace

Suggestions for managers and co-workers— gathered from Tolerance.org—include the following:

- Make it clear that anti-Asian sentiments will not be tolerated. Reiterate policies against harassment based on religion, ethnicity and national origin as well as procedures for addressing workplace discrimination and harassment. Urge employees to report improper conduct.
- Value the input of every employee.
- Vary your lunch partners. Seek out co-workers of different backgrounds, from different departments, and at different levels in the company.
- Avoid singling out employees of a particular race or ethnicity to "handle" diversity issues on behalf of everyone else.

Resources

If you feel you are being discriminated against, here are some organizations that may be of assistance:

Asian-American Justice Center
1140 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Suite 1200
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 296-2300
www.advancingequality.org

U.S. Commission on Civil Rights
www.usccr.gov
The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights investigates discrimination complaints.

Tolerance.org
www.tolerance.org

Sources: Tolerance.org, Anti-defamation League, www.adl.org; Massachusetts Governor's Task Force on Hate Crimes, www.doe.mass.edu/news/news.asp?id=1319; "Braced for Backlash" by Jessica Bennett and Noelle Chun, *Newsweek*, April 18, 2007, www.msnbc.msn.com/id/18178194/site/newsweek/

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