



Most importantly, how can we restore our children's confidence that we want them to be safe where they live, learn and play and will do whatever is necessary to fulfill this essential adult responsibility? It is urgent that we begin by:

- Making sure school safety plans across the country address the need for safe, nurturing schools offering physical protection from guns and close connections and supportive relationships between staff and students.
- Eliminating zero tolerance discipline policies and focusing on understanding children's experiences, feelings and fears rather than simply punishing their behaviors.
- Minimizing the threats of gang violence and mass shootings in children's neighborhoods and schools by restricting gun access for those under 21 and other high risk groups, implementing universal background checks, and banning assault weapons, high capacity magazines and bump stocks through common sense gun laws in state legislatures and Congress.

When asked how she would change the world if she could make one change, a 16-year-old girl said: "To not have to wake up and be scared to do normal things, like go to the movies because [someone] decided to shoot it up one night. Nowadays it's scary to go anywhere because you never know what's going to happen." ...Every child has the right to live, learn and grow up safely free from gun violence and fear and realize their God-given potential. And every adult has a responsibility to protect our young and ensure they can reach adulthood safely.

Adapted from a Child Watch column by Marian Wright Edelman, President of the Children's Defense Fund.

For more information and opportunities to act, visit www.childrensdefense.org



2018 National Observance of Children's Sabbaths **"Realizing Dr. King's Vision for *Every Child:* Lives of Hope, Not Despair"**

END GUN VIOLENCE

The school shootings are scary and we feel like nothing can stop it from happening.

– 11-year-old girl, Indiana

We are afraid because there are too many threats at schools. I want my school to be safe and to have art because kids like art.

– 8-year-old girl, Wisconsin

No one is doing anything to make me feel safe at school.

– 14-year-old girl, Washington, D.C.

We deserve to have a childhood.

– 13-year-old boy, Pennsylvania

What worries children most at the start of a new school year? In simpler times it might have been remembering their locker combination or making sure they had a friend to sit with at lunch. But a recent Children's Defense Fund's Parent and Child Trends Survey by YouGov found fear of a school shooting the second most common worry for children between 6 and 17 years old and the third most common for parents. One-third of children surveyed said they are worried about a shooting happening at their school. Only worries about being bullied are more common.





Children deserve a safe and happy childhood. Instead they are being robbed of their innocence by pervasive gun violence that nags and picks at their minds and spirits, day in and day out, snuffing out joy. Today children in kindergarten classrooms are taught how to react if someone enters their school and starts firing a gun. The recent wave of tragic school shootings, from Sandy Hook Elementary to Stoneman Douglas High School, has cemented mass violence as a huge everyday concern among a broad cross-section of America's children. Our survey shows fear of a school shooting is consistent across racial, ethnic and income groups. Only 59 percent of all children—and only 42 percent of Black children—say they feel safe at school. What a shameful abnegation of adult responsibility.

Children and parents also are worried about safety and gun violence outside their classrooms and schools. Although more children say they feel safe in their neighborhood than in school, the fear of school and neighborhood shootings expressed by children and their parents is an urgent call to action for all of us—parents, grandparents, neighbors, teachers, advocates, faith leaders and elected officials—to stand up, speak out, take action and vote for people who protect children, not guns. Children should feel safe wherever they live, learn and play.



Given their worries about mass shootings, it's not surprising that a majority of children and an even higher proportion of parents believe there are too many guns in the United States and that they are too easy to get. Parents and children also are much more likely to place priority on protecting people from gun violence over protecting the right of people to own guns. Black children and parents are most likely to feel this way.

Overall, CDF's survey shows children all across our country crying out for help and safety. Ultimately children just want to feel safe in school and they and their parents believe creating safe, nurturing schools requires more than physical protection from guns. Almost all of them consider close connections and trusting relationships with school staff critical components of school safety. About 90 percent of children and parents agree children need adults at school they can talk to about their problems.

To honor their views, amplify their voices, and protect child lives it should be a no-brainer for a decent and responsible nation to do everything it can to keep children safe in their schools and neighborhoods. It's a disgrace and complete collapse of adult responsibility to permit our children to go to school afraid of being gunned down in school hallways or schoolyards.

What has happened to us as adults and as a people to have become accustomed to living in a country where senseless murders of children in schools and communities are commonplace? What values lead us to protect guns over children?

