

SANDY HOOK PROMISE PRESENTS



“Just Joking” PSA

EMPOWERING AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

● FOR YOUTH ●

TO COMPLEMENT THE PSA

The Sandy Hook Promise (SHP) PSA “Just Joking” takes real threats made by school shooters and turns them into punchlines. The PSA ends with a call-to-action that urges viewers to challenge assumptions and take action when there are warning signs of violence. As taught in SHP’s [Say Something program](#), youth can take action by becoming Upstanders, noticing warning signs and threats of violence, taking any overt statement or post about a threat seriously, acting immediately, and telling Trusted Adults.

● ● ● ● INVITATION ● ● ● ●

YOU'RE INVITED TO A SCREENING AND COMMUNITY CONVERSATION
ON THE SANDY HOOK PROMISE PSA:

“Just Joking”



WHEN: _____

WHERE: _____

RSVP TO: _____

Email Template:

Dear _____,

I am writing to invite you to a special community screening and conversation of the Sandy Hook Promise PSA: Just Joking. Please join us on _____ (date) from _____ p.m./a.m. at the _____ (location).

After viewing the PSA, we will engage in a community conversation about the emotional, mental, and physical impact of school shootings and violence and what we can do collectively to keep our schools and communities safe.

Looking forward to our conversation,

Name of Host

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Threats Are Never Jokes

The PSA can be used as a teaching tool in a classroom to encourage youth to enact agency, do prosocial actions, and be instrumental players in school safety. Educators can find complete lesson units and additional lesson plans on the [Sandy Hook Promise Digital Learning Center](#).

Additionally, youth leaders interested in learning how to make a direct impact on school safety can learn how to get involved in SAVE (Students Against Violence Everywhere) Promise Clubs [here](#).

Before facilitating any of the following activities, ensure that you review this checklist:

- Trust has been established in our group, club, or classroom. Youth feel safe expressing thoughts, ideas, and feelings about sensitive topics.
- I will inform the group that the content in the day's activity is about violence and school shootings. Any student is welcome to opt out of the PSA viewing and activity without penalty. I have found a safe alternate setting where participants opting-out can stay.
- I have identified a Counselor or Mental Health Specialist and discussed my plans for showing the PSA and facilitating follow-up activities. The Counselor or Mental Health Specialist will provide thought leadership, suggestions, and additional supports for youth who would like to process information and feelings about school shootings further.

Time Is of the Essence

The key learnings for youth from the PSA and *Say Something* program are:

- ✓ There are warning signs of violence, and **youth Upstanders are key players** in preventing acts of violence.
- ✓ If you witness someone making a threat, act immediately, **it's not a joke**.
- ✓ Joking about violence is dangerous for the whole community.
- ✓ We can build a culture of care and connection together by spreading the message that "saying something" is not snitching, ratting, or tattling.
- ✓ Saying something will **not damage your social reputation**.
- ✓ **It is your place** to "say something." Don't wait and assume someone else is reporting the threat.



Classroom and SAVE Promise Club Activities

UNLOCK THE CODE OF SILENCE

This activity was inspired by SHP Youth Lab member, [Aashi](#). Aashi formerly served on the SHP National Youth Advisory Board and is currently attending college. As seen in the “Just Joking” PSA, school shooters **explicitly showed** or **verbally expressed** warning signs, threats, and statements about plans for acts of violence. After tragedies like the school shootings mentioned in the PSA, people often wonder, “why didn’t someone say something?” or “how could this tragedy have been prevented?”

First, show the PSA to the group twice. After viewing the PSA, **empower youth** with the message that they can do something by “saying something” if they ever hear a threat or encounter a warning sign of violence.

Next, **activate thinking** about the PSA and activity by asking the group the questions below. When posing questions, provide adequate time for youth to **think-reflect-react**.

- *What things do our peers keep to themselves? What types of things do we have **a secret code of silence** about?*
- *What are high school “unspoken rules” that we live and breathe by?*
- *Are there special unspoken rules for youth that are unique to our community?*
- *What can we do to **unlock the code of silence** that we have about sensitive topics and issues like warning signs or threats?*
- *Lastly, ask students to pair up. Give each pair an **Unlock the Code of Silence worksheet** or project on screen and instruct them to draw their own lock. Using active speaking and listening strategies, encourage each pair to chose one of the following activities:*

1. Write a combination that will unlock the code of silence. Combination locks usually require a set of three numbers. On your combination lock, write down the combination that will:
 - Shift our thinking about keeping secrets.
 - Admit to ourselves that we cannot handle everything alone, and that’s ok.
 - Create a culture of openness and support.
 - Debunk the myth that getting help for someone is also being a snitch or a rat.
2. Design an open “lock of love” that shows the key to success for “saying something” when warning signs are noticed or threats are made.



Lock = Silence



Unlock the Code of Silence

WRITE OR DRAW YOUR PERSONAL COMBINATION
FOR “UNLOCKING THE CODE OF SILENCE.”



Lock = Silence

Eradicate Joke Culture Campaign

Just like reporting serious threats immediately, it is important to raise awareness about the harm of making false “jokes” about very serious situations. For example, people may make what they believe are jokes about potentially life-threatening issues such as:

- *I have so much homework I should just kill myself.*
- *That kid looks like the poster child for active shooters.*
- *I’m so fat I’m going to become bulimic so I can fit in my prom dress.*

After viewing the PSA, divide youth into groups of four and five and present the following authentic learning project:

- Develop a campaign to **combat joke culture** in our community.
- Give your campaign a catchy title.
- Present your campaign to the class.

Invite community members and/or school administration to listen to the campaigns. Ask the community to vote on the most impactful campaign and for support getting the anti-joke culture messages displayed and spread throughout the community.

Share your youth-created campaigns with SHP at programs@sandyhookpromise.org

Approachability: Trusted Adults and Environment



Youth have reported not “saying something” because they feel like they do not have a trustworthy adult to go to for help or they find the adults in their communities “unapproachable.”

LIST IT!

Write a list of the **top three things the adults in your community** can do to be approachable to youth when they need to report warning signs or threats.

DESIGN IT!

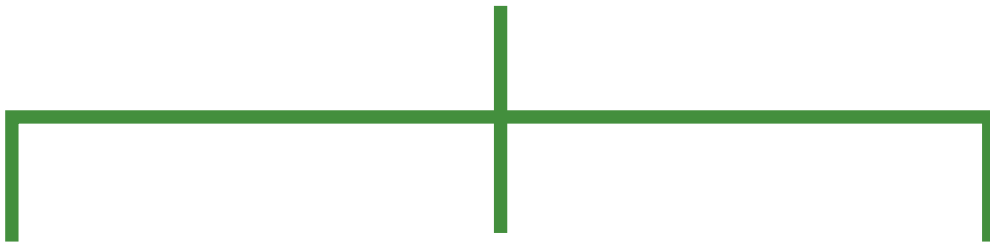
In groups of three, **design a safe, brave space** for convening as a group. Collectively draw a space that is comforting and approachable for youth.



Squashing Swatting

There has been a trend in false or fake shooting, bomb, and violence threats. These types of purposeful threats are identified as “swatting.” In many school districts and states, swatting is illegal. Swatting also scares and traumatizes people and communities. Take time to review the special report from [PBS News Hour](#). The positive news is that youth are positioned to be Upstanders against swatting. For this activity:

- Briefly review the meaning of “squashing” something and a quick overview of the more recent swatting trend. Inform the group that “to squash” is to **crush, put down, suppress, end, or stop something from happening**.
- Ask students to pair up.
- In pairs, brainstorm how you can collectively work together to squash swatting and other harmful, dangerous jokes and pranks.
- Use your generated list of ways to squash swatting and co-design an **Infographic** that contains the problem statement and three solutions.



Say Something Gallery Walk

WHICH SCHOOL SAFETY ISSUES MOST CONCERN YOU?

The PSA invites a larger discussion about school safety. Show the group the *Say Something* program student training. Once the training is complete, place the following signs in three areas of a common space. Divide the large group into three small groups and assign each group to a station. Provide groups with sticky notes to post responses and ideas. Rotate stations every five minutes and at the end conduct a gallery walk so that groups can review all responses. Use this activity as a launching point to reinforce the importance of telling a Trusted Adult if any warning signs or threats are noticed.

[Station One](#) [Station Two](#) [Station Three](#)



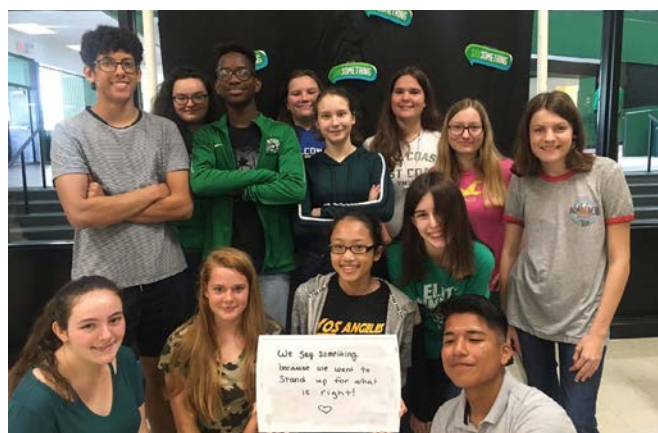
Say Something Safety Net Card



After viewing the PSA, instruct young people to identify at least one nonparental Trusted Adult they can go to for help. Provide copies of the *Say Something* Safety Net Card that can be filled out and kept in phone cases, journals, backpacks, and other spaces for easy access in the event of threats or warning signs.

Make the Say Something Pledge

As a community, take the [Say Something pledge](#) to act immediately and tell a Trusted Adult when threats are noticed or heard. Ask each member of the community to complete a pledge handprint and display in a central location of your school or organization.



Letters

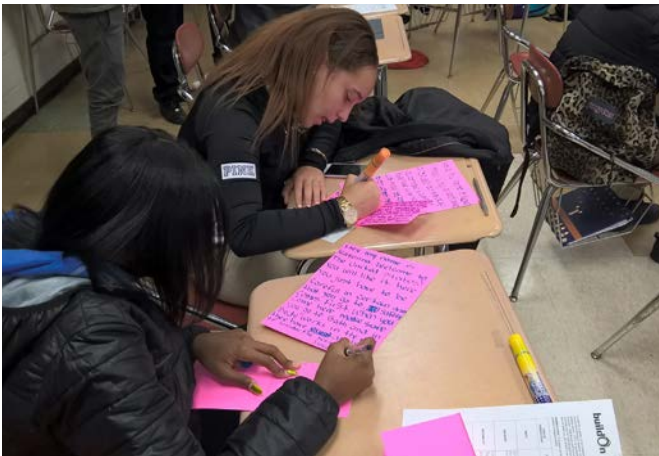
A Letter to Your Trusted Adult

The statements made by actual school shooters were heard or witnessed by people and could have been prevented if someone said something to a Trusted Adult. Invite youth to think of the one nonparental Trusted Adult that they can go to for support, guidance, and help. Next, encourage youth to write their Trusted Adult a letter using this [template](#) and to reach out and connect to their Trusted Adult within the week.



The Sandy Hook Generation: Self-Empathy Letter

Print or display The Daily Tar Heel article, [A love letter to those grieving: You are not alone](#). Read the article as a group, preferably in a jigsaw fashion or ask each member of the group takes turns reading one or two lines.



Inform the group that the article is in response to a recent shooting on the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill Campus. Highlight the quote below:

We are the Sandy Hook generation. We grew up crouching behind desks in pitch-black darkness, as our teachers barred the doors shut in case a “scary person” stepped on campus.

*This epidemic has only worsened over time: The Gun Violence Archive counted 645 mass shootings in 2022 alone. **It is truly no wonder that my generation has become so desensitized to gun violence we make jokes about it.***

The author also shares a retrospective story:

*My mind traveled back to fourth grade P.E. when the class troublemaker thought it would be funny to pull the active shooter alarm a couple months after Sandy Hook. Our teacher shoved us into the equipment closet and told us to stay silent. At age 10, I wrestled with the fact that I might face the same exact fate as those children who lived just a couple of states north of me. When the kid who pulled the alarm ‘fessed up, I remember screaming at him through tears, **“It isn’t funny!”***

After the group reading, present the group with the task of writing a love letter to themselves, an expression of self-empathy. You may use the template on the following page.

Dear Self,

To care for my own well-being, I Promise to "say something" should I ever hear someone pose a threat or show a warning sign. This Upstander action is one of courage and empathy for myself and others.

I can take care of my heart in these situations by

I can take care of my mind in these situations by

I can take care of my body in these situations by

With Love and Care,



CommUNITY Problem-Solve: Micro Circle Ups

Use this [Circle Up discussion guide](#) to establish a circle discussion procedure and routine. For this Circle Up, ask youth to lead and co-facilitate Micro Circle Ups with 6 – 8 people per circle. Use the Circle Norms and Know the Signs Community Agreement when available as reminders to practice active and compassionate speaking and listening skills. Arrange chairs or desks in three small circle formations or invite students to sit in comfortable position in open spaces. Reinforce that it is important that all youth feel seen and heard during circle rounds, have the choice to participate or pass (particularly important with sensitive topics like school shootings), and are all important members of the circle community. Allow students to participate however they feel comfortable and encourage them to use the [Circle Up Reflection Sheet](#).

Divide the class into three or four evenly dispersed groups and instruct each group to move to one of the Micro Circle Up areas. When the group is seated in a circle, ask one student volunteer to review the Know the Signs Community Agreement and/or the Circle Norms. Also, ask a couple of students to co-facilitate the circle.

MICRO CIRCLE UP GUIDE FOR YOUTH

Inform the group that they will have 20 minutes for the discussion.

CHECK IN (2 MINUTES)

- How is your head, heart, and body feeling at the moment?
- Is there anything you can do to get yourself ready to participate in today's circle?
- Take a moment to get into a positive space for the circle discussion.

OPENING (3 MINUTES)

Introduce the Circle Up co-facilitators.

Ask the group for a volunteer timekeeper.

Remind your peers about the Circle Up procedures. Take the first five minutes to review the procedures, set up a centerpiece, and select a talking piece.

- Set up a centerpiece. Each group can collectively decide upon a centerpiece, or, use the provided empathy heart cutout.
- Use a talking piece for a "one-voice-at-a-time" policy. Each group can collectively decide upon a talking piece.
- Use "I statements."
- Actively listen and be present.
- Listen and speak without judgment.
- Participation is not mandatory, share if you feel comfortable.

CIRCLE ROUND #1

- Has a joke ever made you feel uncomfortable? Where was the joke told? Was it something said in school? On social media? On TV?
- What do you consider crossing the line with jokes?

- What types of jokes are told around our campus that cross the line?
- When a classmate says, “I have so much homework I could kill myself,” what can we do to be Upstanders?
- How can we raise awareness about the damage and danger of joke culture?

CIRCLE ROUND #2

- Why do you think students make jokes about real, serious issues?
- What can you do to help create a school culture where joking about these things is not cool?
- How can you be an Upstander when someone makes these comments around you?

CIRCLE ROUND #3

- What part can you play in making sure that “saying something” to Trusted Adults does not damage youth’s social reputation?



OPTIMISTIC CLOSURE

Share one word aloud that expresses how you feel after today’s Circle Up discussion. Reiterate that as a community, together, you can improve community safety by “saying something” whenever any warning signs are noticed, or threats are conveyed. You can also work collectively to squash the joke culture and express that it is not funny and makes you feel unsafe when jokes are told about serious life-threatening topics.

Host an Open Mic Event

Empower youth to create their own spoken word poetry or another form of artistic expression that inspires their peers to speak up and “say something.” Use this [lesson plan](#) as a launching point.





Circle Centerpiece



References

A love letter to those grieving: You are not alone. (n.d.). A Love Letter to Those Grieving: You Are Not Alone. — The Daily Tar Heel. September 13, 2023. <https://www.dailytarheel.com/article/2023/08/opinion-grief-letter-youre-not-alone>

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