



PsySSA Statement: Parktown Boys High School tragedy

The Society for Educational Psychology of South Africa (SEPSA) drafted the statement on the Parktown Boys High School tragedy on behalf of the Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA)

22 January 2020

PsySSA is the professional body representing psychology professionals in South Africa. PsySSA has, since its inception, been dedicated to making a significant contribution to solving the pressing human development problems in South Africa. PsySSA is committed to the transformation and development of South African Psychology to serve the needs and interests of all South Africa's people. PsySSA advances psychology as a science, profession and as a means of promoting human well-being (<https://www.psyssa.com>).

Position Statement

The Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA) joins the nation in expressing its sadness over the death of young Enoch Mpianzi who lost his life during a school camp. The death of a child, in any manner, is a most tragic event for a family and in the lives of parents. When a child dies in such circumstances while in the care of an institution like a school, it is especially disturbing.

Parents send their children to school, putting complete faith and trust in the school authorities to keep them safe. While it is acknowledged that schools face significant challenges in executing their various roles and responsibilities, child safety cannot be compromised in any way. This is because their safety has to be overseen by competent adults, for the simple reason that the developing brain does not equip children to completely and adequately ensure their personal safety. The research evidence in cognitive neuroscience makes it quite clear that children and adolescents cannot foresee and evaluate situations of danger as effectively as adults can. The same evidence indicates that as a function of the maturing brain, even adolescents up to the early twenties are drawn to and attracted by activities that may be perceived as exciting, while their ability to assess risk and danger is not optimally developed. It, therefore, falls on us as the adults in society to provide safe spaces for our children to develop and grow.

PsySSA has, for some time, raised its concern about the safety of all our school children in various contexts and unsafe environments. These have ranged from those in poor rural schools with hazardous ablution facilities to those in urban schools where other dangers prevail. Within the first week of the 2020 school year, South Africans learned with great sadness of at least two young lives lost within the schooling context. As the nationally representative body of Psychology professionals, PsySSA calls upon the Department of Education to prioritise children's safety in all aspects of their learning environment.

Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA)

Johannesburg

21 January 2020

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