



**THE MELISSA INSTITUTE**  
*For Violence Prevention and Treatment*

**2020 Report to the Community**

# **Working Together to End Violence**

Dear Friends,

As we write, there have been at least 289 mass shootings in the U.S. thus far in 2019. With grieving hearts, we recognize that there is the real potential for many more massacres. We must take action now and shout out “ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!” Violence destroys lives, families and communities. It breaks our collective hearts with a feeling of helplessness each time we hear another report of violence. We must transform our grief and sadness to fight for real change. By investing in the power of prevention and using proven ways to stop violence, we accelerate the road to a healthier, safer society.



For 23 years, The Melissa Institute has been a catalyst for positive change locally and nationally. You, our donors, have been directly responsible for our success. Your donations have enabled the Institute to provide consultations and conferences to numerous groups, support research-based programs, provide direct service to those in need and support new research in violence prevention. We have trained over 8,000 professionals and 3,500 youths and provided over \$100,000 in scholarships to doctoral students to support research. We have a well-deserved reputation for excellence in everything we do. Please visit our website, [www.melissainstitute.org](http://www.melissainstitute.org), to get an in-depth look at our work.

In the 2020 Report to the Community, you will learn about the direction and initiatives of The Melissa Institute under the leadership of our new Executive Director, Dr. Etiony Aldarondo. Etiony is an accomplished domestic violence researcher, clinician and administrator. He is nationally recognized for his transformational leadership skills, innovative intervention programs and the development of effective community partnerships. Knowing Etiony’s vision – coupled with his unflinching, passionate determination to help repair the world and prevent violence – makes us very excited and confident about the future of The Melissa Institute. In this report, you will also read educational articles from several of our esteemed Scientific Board members, as well as some of the highlights of our work during the past year.

Our mission of preventing violence and promoting safer communities is even more relevant today. For the sake of our children, families and friends now and for generations to come, we must rise to the challenge and increase the scope and impact of our efforts. We encourage you to educate others on the importance of violence prevention, and use social media to follow us and spread our message. The prevention of the devastating effects of violence in our society requires a collaborative effort. As the lifeline of our success, we need your financial support now more than ever. **Please make a generous charitable gift today!** For additional information about various charitable gift options and how to join our Peace Donors Society, please go to [www.melissainstitute.org](http://www.melissainstitute.org).

Thank you for your support and for joining us in this effort.

**Lynn Aptman**  
Founder and President

**Michael Aptman, M.D.**  
Founder

# Future Directions

“We have met the enemy and he is us.” This simple phrase from Pogo’s popular 1970’s comic strip continues to give us important insight about ourselves and the world around us. It seems to me that in the United States — with our reprehensibly high rates of violence, including the number of murders nearing its highest point in the last two decades — Pogo’s quip has become especially valid.

The Melissa Institute came into being in 1996 because of the murder of a beloved young woman. Our mission has been to prevent violence, build resilience and promote safer communities through education and the application of research-based knowledge. We have provided thousands of professionals and parents with the tools to understand various forms of violence and how to address its consequences. As a result of our work, many acts of violence have been prevented and lives saved. Unfortunately, despite our efforts, progress continues to be limited by resistance to adopt proven policies and strategies to prevent violence and a collective indifference to act as agents of violence prevention.

***We consider the active engagement of all sectors of society critically important to increase the impact of the Institute’s violence prevention efforts locally and nationally.***

Today, there is substantial scientific evidence that people have a greater chance to witness repeated acts of violence if they live in states without appropriate gun control regulations and with easy access to guns, attend schools with limited student mental health services, or live in homes with insufficient parental supervision. We also know that violence is preventable. For example, we can help prevent violence and save lives by adopting appropriate policies and interventions to reduce risks and educate and prepare everyone to be “active bystanders.”

For me, having spent my professional career at the intersection of violence research, clinical practice and community partnerships for justice and wellness, becoming The Melissa Institute’s Executive Director is both an honor and an exciting challenge. It is an honor because the Institute and its founders have long been a source of inspiration and professional gratification in my life. As a member of the Scientific Board since 2004 and the Board of Directors from 2014 to 2018, I came into this position with a heartfelt appreciation for the Institute’s commitment to violence prevention and the vision for the Institute to be a tool for good — for peace and harmony — in our communities.

We are redefining and expanding The Melissa Institute’s objectives and initiatives. Up to now, the training of educators, mental health professionals and other human service providers has been the Institute’s primary focus. Henceforth, we will expand the educational and training efforts to businesses, religious organizations,

law enforcement, community-based organizations and the lay public. We consider the active engagement of all sectors of society critically important to increase the impact of the Institute’s violence prevention efforts locally and nationally.

As part of this expanded initiative, we will develop a series of targeted training programs, including trainings for the workforce and for places of worship based on active bystandership and trauma-informed care research and practice. Consistent with these efforts, our 2020 Annual Conference — “Preventing Violence Through Active Bystandership” — will be led by world-class experts on the topic and serve as a launching pad for the dissemination of proven active bystander intervention strategies for schools, communities and law enforcement agencies. Our long-term goal is to identify best practices and articulate a conceptual framework for stakeholders to collaborate in a unified violence prevention and peace promotion action plan for Miami and ultimately for the nation.

Our bullying prevention program has reached over 3,500 youth over the last 15 years. The program educates student leaders to become catalysts for change in their school and help make a lasting impact in their communities. Thanks to your generous response to our summer funding drive, we will be able to expand the program to include more schools in high-risk areas.

We are developing The Melissa Institute Trauma-Informed Care Network for mental health professionals to help address their ongoing training needs in our region. We are also engaging elected officials and law enforcement leaders to support policies and practices designed to prevent violence.

Violence prevention work is incredibly challenging. Embracing this challenge, the Institute is determined to markedly increase the impact of our prevention efforts in our schools, homes, places of worship, workplaces and community. Mindful of Pogo’s words and equipped with research-based knowledge, a remarkable Scientific Board and your generous financial support, I am confident that we can advance scientifically sound actions by our society and help transform indifference into informed acts of violence prevention.

I am exceedingly grateful for your warm welcome and look forward to having the opportunity to talk in more detail with you about our work and about the various ways you can help us fulfill our mission.

**Etiony Aldarondo, Ph.D.**  
Executive Director



# 23rd Annual May Conference

By Richard Westlund

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a challenging condition for families, teachers and counselors — particularly since many popular concepts and therapies are not based on science, according to one of the leading scholars in the field.

“ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder, not a psychopathology,” said Russell Barkley, Ph.D., clinical professor of psychiatry at the Virginia Treatment Center for Children and Virginia Commonwealth University Medical Center in Richmond. “It is an impairment of the brain’s executive function, inhibiting a child’s ability to delay gratification or consider the consequences of behavior.”

Dr. Barkley was a keynote speaker at our 23rd annual conference, “ADHD, Aggression and Emotional Dysregulation: Practical Implications for School, Clinical and Community Settings,” on May 3 at the University

of Miami’s Shalala Student Center. He presented along with our Research Director, Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D.

More than 200 professionals, parents and community leaders from throughout South Florida attended the conference, which was presented in partnership with the University of Miami School of Education and Human Development, Baptist Health South Florida and Jewish Community

Services of South Florida.

Institute President Lynn Aptman and Education Director Elise Suna welcomed attendees to the conference, along with Daniel Santisteban, a member of the Institute’s Scientific Board and Professor and Director of the Community and Educational Well-Being Research Center in the University of Miami’s School of Education and Human Development.



Board Member Dan Santisteban, Ph.D. welcomes attendees

From left: Michael Aptman, M.D., Lynn Aptman, M.Ed., Russell Barkley, Ph.D., Elise Suna, M.S.Ed., LMFT, Donald Meichenbaum, Ph.D.

## Suzanne L. Keeley, Ph.D. Community Service Award

This year’s recipient of the Suzanne L. Keeley Community Service Award was Kristi House’s Project GOLD. Project GOLD provides outreach and services to children exploited in sex trafficking to help them overcome the trauma of commercial sexual exploitation by traffickers and predators.



## Miami Gardens Bullying Prevention Conference

Board member Trish Ramsay, M.A., and Education Director Elise Suna, M.S.Ed., LMFT, taught fourth- and fifth-grade student leaders in Miami Gardens about being an Upstander to prevent bullying.

A special thank-you to our host, Hibiscus Elementary!



## SOS Donation

The Melissa Institute received a \$3,000 donation from Students Offering Support (SOS) in May to support our bullying prevention services. The funds were raised through the annual Bowling Against Bullying event and other fundraising activities. We are thankful for the generosity of these impressive high school students.



# Top 5 Considerations for Building Trauma-Responsive Schools

By Colleen Cicchetti, Ph.D.

Executive Director, Center for Childhood Resilience; Associate Professor, Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine; Pritzker Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Health, Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago

For those of us who have been involved in efforts to promote awareness of the impact of exposure to trauma and violence on children and families, we are in a very interesting time. Public awareness of the impact of exposure to trauma and violence has reached a level that most of us could not possibly have anticipated or hoped for only 10 years ago. References to the impact of childhood adversity and traumatic stress have reached popular culture as reflected in references by news anchors, public officials and celebrities. Similarly, references to strategies that promote stress reduction and wellness are prolific.

The unexpected challenge for trauma experts has become not how to promote awareness, but how to ensure that the definition, awareness and strategies to address trauma are not diluted or short-sighted. Every-day references to "trauma" can significantly undermine our efforts to build systems and strategies to address this public health crisis. This challenge impacts all of our large child-serving agencies dramatically, but schools represent a key focus. Schools are responsive to multiple stakeholders, including students, teachers, parents and communities, as well as local, state and national policies. When public awareness of an issue that impacts children is high, schools are often on the front line in terms of public attention. How are schools addressing these experiences? How might these issues be impacting our social contract? What are the potential resources that can be allocated to address an identified need, particularly one that is inequitable in the distribution across our students and families? How might addressing this issue impact our other goals and objectives as a school or district?

Fortunately, the Trauma Responsive School (TRS) movement is gaining ground. What it is not: A program that a school can simply purchase and implement "off the shelf" or by sending staff to attend a single mandatory professional development program. Instead, it is an effort to change the practices and mindsets of the adults in our communities. This type of change works only when the following best practices are included:

- **Complex Solutions.** The types of traumatic experiences and exposures are unique, diverse and complex. Therefore, the solutions to address the impact on students must also be complex and aligned to the specific needs of children and families in each school community.
- **Collaborative Leadership Teams.** The efforts to create a trauma-responsive school cannot be delegated to the school's mental health support staff, discipline staff or a small group of self-selected, enthusiastic teachers. Instead, a multidisciplinary approach with administrator buy-in is required. Administrative leadership (at the individual school or district level) is key to ensuring that a TRS effort is aligned with school priorities and that staff

time is allocated for thoughtful assessment, planning and implementation of best practices and strategies.

- **Universal Approaches.** School climate and schoolwide strategies are a critical and foundational component of an effective TRS approach. These strategies can be distilled to three priorities: creating safe environments, both physically and emotionally, for students and staff; prioritizing strategies that promote strong relationships for staff, students and families; and modeling and teaching specific strategies for regulating emotions and conflict.
- **Institutional Commitment to Organizational and Individual Self-care Priorities.** Strategies must include an investment in supporting the professional workforce. There is growing evidence of significant impact for front-line providers working with children and adults experiencing trauma. Estimates of impact vary, but nationally teachers unions and school districts report teachers asking for more training in trauma and acknowledging that the stress of feeling ill-prepared to manage complex challenges is negatively impacting their professional and personal lives. Educators stress that this cannot fall on the individual teacher, but must be embedded within an organizational culture of caring and self-reflection that includes professional learning communities, mentorship and policies aligned with wellness.
- **Assessment Tools with Measurable Action Plans.** Coordinated and sustained efforts require a roadmap that includes a clear definition of goals and priorities, broad assessment of current practice aligned with the model, and tools for progress monitoring and action planning. Fortunately, a web-based, free access tool is currently available nationally that meets these objectives. The Trauma Responsive Schools-Implementation Assessment (TRS-IA) was developed by a team of experts and is available on the Center for School Mental Health SHAPE website ([www.shape.org/TRS-IA](http://www.shape.org/TRS-IA))

*Continued on page 4*



## Top 5 Considerations for Building Trauma-Responsive Schools *Continued from page 3*

As our awareness grows that trauma is common and rarely an isolated event that impacts just one child or family, but is more often embedded in socio-cultural factors of poverty and racial disparities, the solutions must expand beyond schools. Building community approaches and collaborations to address the needs of families that are often marginalized with little access to services is the work of communities. This includes policymakers, healthcare and social service providers, as well as our business, civic and philanthropic leaders. Working together to build strong supports and opportunities for children to thrive and flourish is an opportunity for child advocacy that educators can embrace, promote and lead. Tools and resources exist to support this important work, and best practices are emerging to align with educational and civic priorities. In

addition, legislation to mandate training and allocate public resources is emerging at the state and national levels. The time is now and we are ready. Let's move forward together.

### List of key resources:

**Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators.** ([www.NCTSN.org](http://www.NCTSN.org))

**TRS-IA: Developed by the NCTSN Treatment and Services Adaptation Center for Resilience, Hope and Wellness in Schools and the Center for School Mental Health** (<https://theshapesystem.com/trauma/>)

**Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative (TLPI): Helping Traumatized Children Learn: A Report and Policy Agenda; Helping Traumatized Children Learn II: Creating and Advocating for Trauma-Sensitive Schools.** ([www.traumasensitiveschools.org](http://www.traumasensitiveschools.org))

**Center for Childhood Resilience CCR:** [www.childhoodresilience.org](http://www.childhoodresilience.org)

## 5 Ways to Foster Cultures of Active Bystanders at Home and in the Community

By Ron Slaby, Ph.D.

Senior Scientist, Center on Media and Child Health, Boston Children's Hospital/Harvard Medical School & Scientific Advisory Board, The Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention and Treatment

*The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference.*

— Elie Wiesel

Bystander research was initially spurred by sensational and disturbing news reports — later criticized for inaccuracies — of the case of Catherine “Kitty” Genovese, who was brutally stabbed to death in Queens, N.Y., in 1964, while dozens of bystanders reportedly watched from their apartments and did nothing to help her. In the 55 years since this momentous event, our growing understanding of the

fundamental importance of bystander behavior in shaping our society has evolved through three stages of research: (1) observation; (2) experimentation; and (3) intervention.

In the first stage, bystander behavior was simply observed and described in a variety of situations. In the second stage, key individual factors were experimentally manipulated to help us understand why some bystanders act to help others in need, while others do not. It was not until about 1989 that our current third stage of bystander intervention research began, with the realization that individuals, groups and communities could be taught to become active bystanders, who are prepared to help others in need. This line of research was later fueled by Columbine (1999) and other school shootings and bullying episodes.

In the last 30 years, many research-based bystander intervention programs have proven to be powerful educational strategies for addressing various harmful social behaviors — including bullying, school shootings, men's violence against women and other gender role-related violence. Many bystander intervention programs now offer a wealth of knowledge, strategies and skills-building exercises to help bystanders prepare to respond effectively when facing particular social problems.

At a broader level, we can foster a culture of active bystanders, with support at home and in the community, by addressing the fundamentals of helpful bystander behavior. Here are five key elements that can be developed through discussion, specific examples, role-playing exercises, guided practice and real-life modeling of behavior.



- **Bystander Agency.** Many bystanders fail to realize that by their mere presence, they have an influence on how others behave, whether or not they intend to. For example, bystanders can encourage bullying behavior in various ways — by providing an audience, passively accepting, egging on or joining in with the bullying. But bystanders can learn to become aware of their influence, and then to deliberately act in a helpful way, thereby developing a sense of personal “agency” as helpful bystanders.
- **Bystander Efficacy Beliefs.** Some people believe that bystanders cannot be effective if they try to help. They may hold: (a) the general belief that bystanders cannot help to stop any form of violence; (b) specific beliefs that bystanders cannot help to stop violence in specific situations; and/or (c) a personal belief that they themselves are incapable of helping to stop violence. Although such efficacy beliefs can prevent people from becoming active bystanders, these beliefs can be changed through discussions, examples and modeling about how bystanders can effectively help.
- **Bystander Empathy.** Empathy for others in need is often a key motivator for bystanders to attempt to help. Bystander empathy can be encouraged to grow beyond immediate friends and relatives to include feelings of caring and concern for acquaintances, strangers and all people in need. “Love thy neighbor” can grow to include all of our world neighbors.
- **Bystander Social Support.** Bystanders are more likely to report violence or to intervene if they feel that others will support them. When people receive bystander intervention training in group settings, they become more confident that others in the group will also be ready to help. If a group of bystanders surround a victim, they can be effective in protecting the victim without having to directly confront the person who is bullying. For child bystanders to feel confident reporting incidents of bullying or signs of potential violence, they need to develop trusting relationships with adults who will honor the child’s trust, take their reports seriously, maintain their anonymity, if needed, and provide help.
- **Bystander Skills.** In building bystander skills, it is helpful to think ahead and plan a variety of responses geared to typical bullying or violent situations, while also considering safety and practicality. For example, when facing a bullying situation, if a bystander feels safe to directly intervene, he can tell the bully to stop, distract or redirect, become a peacemaker or urge the victim or bully to walk away. If a bystander does not feel safe intervening alone, he can get help from a trusted adult, rally support from other bystanders, join others to quietly protect or remove the victim or console and give support to the victim during or even after the incident has ended.



# Peace & Harmony

The Melissa Institute hosted its annual Peace & Harmony event March 9 at The Ritz-Carlton Coconut Grove, Miami. Guests enjoyed a special private concert by Latin Grammy Award-winning flutist Nestor Torres and a silent auction with over 100 items.

A special thank-you to all of our volunteers, donors and supporters!



Maria Pombo, Fernando Londoño, Aaron Snyder and Board Member Maggie Snyder



Latin Grammy Award-winning flutist and Honorary Board Member Nestor Torres



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**Don't miss next year's Peace & Harmony,  
March 7, 2020!**



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Without the participation, expertise and leadership of our volunteer boards, the Institute could not accomplish its goals. These include the Board of Directors, Scientific Board and Honorary Board.

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*This list represents donors from August 1, 2018, through July 31, 2019. We regret any omissions due to the printer's deadline.*

On May 5, 1995, Melissa Aptman was murdered in St. Louis. A Miami native, she was just two weeks away from graduating with her bachelor's degree from Washington University. One year after her death, Melissa's family, friends and violence prevention experts established The Melissa Institute for Violence Prevention and Treatment to honor her memory and make a difference by working to prevent violence and assist victims.



Melissa Aptman

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The Melissa Institute is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to the study and prevention of violence through education, community service, research support and consultation. Our mission is to prevent violence and promote safer communities through education and application of research-based knowledge.

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### **Belfer-Aptman Scholarship Recipients**

The Belfer-Aptman Award is available to graduate students who address issues of violence prevention or treatment. The goal of this award is to support violence prevention research. Congratulations to the 2019 recipients!

- **Jade Kinney, M.A.**  
**Evelyn Hunter, Ph.D., Advisor**  
Auburn University  
*"The Effect of Stereotype Threat on African Americans' Perception of Police Officer Communication Accommodation"*
- **Robyn McClure, M.A., M.Ed.**  
**Shelley Hymel, Ph.D., Advisor**  
University of British Columbia  
*"Empathy and Defending in Bullying Episodes in Pre-adolescence"*
- **Hannah Rasmussen, M.A.**  
**Gayla Margolin, Ph.D., Advisor**  
University of Southern California  
*"Interrupting the Intergenerational Transmission of Aggression: Examining Physiological Reactivity to Infant Cries in Young Adults Before They Become Parents"*



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*[MelissaInstitute.org](http://MelissaInstitute.org) ■ [TeachSafeSchools.org](http://TeachSafeSchools.org) ■ [ReadingTeacher.net](http://ReadingTeacher.net) ■ [SilenceTheViolence.org](http://SilenceTheViolence.org)*