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Mental Health Warns Public to Avoid Diagnosing or Profiling Others as a Reaction to the Virginia Tech Shootings

A Statement by Dr. David Shern, Ph.D. Mental Health President and CEO

ALEXANDRIA, Va. (April 18, 2007) – The shootings at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University affects Americans across the nation. As individuals, campuses and communities come together to respond to this tragedy, Mental Health America (formerly known as the National Mental Health Association) warns the public – students, children, adults, educators and community leaders alike – to avoid diagnosing others with mental health problems or engaging in other “profiling.” Wondering or discussing classmates, neighbors and colleagues mental health or potential for violence is not a productive way to deal with feelings of anxiety and fear.

When disasters of any type occur many people react with a range of emotions – from anger, fear, depression and “numbness,” however, it is important to come together with friends and families to cope with these feelings productively and not begin diagnosing, profiling or asking “what if” questions that can be damaging and counterproductive to improving feelings of wellbeing and community safety.

While it is important to share any suspicious incidents or behaviors with people in authority, this is a time to come together and support other students, friends and family members who may be struggling – rather than questioning their behaviors and possibly isolating others who are struggling with this tragedy.

If feelings are overwhelming, help and support is available. Mental Health can connect people with community resources and information. For information, please call 800-969-6642 or visit www.mentalhealthamerica.net.

Mental Health America is the country’s leading nonprofit dedicated to helping all people live mentally healthier lives. With our more than 320 affiliates nationwide, we represent a growing movement of Americans who promote mental wellness for the health and well-being of the nation – everyday and in times of crisis.