

## **Helping Washington Kids Navigate Tough Times**

### **Local News**

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TACOMA, WA - Schools are seeing more kids, in kindergarten through high school, dealing with their parents' concerns about money and employment, and bringing that stress to school. Many are caring for younger siblings while parents work. This weekend, a group of school employees - from bus drivers and janitors, to teachers' aides - will learn what they can be doing to observe and help.

Malinda McKee, a trainer from Texas who is teaching the workshop, says school support staff can assist both students and teachers if they know what to look for.

"These are just skills that we can teach them - in the hallway, on the playground, in the cafeteria. Children are worrying about adult issues that they have no business worrying about. The children are acting out, and they need those extra pairs of hands and eyes and ears, to try to help them work through some of their problems."

McKee holds these workshops around the country for the *American Federation of Teachers* (AFT). She says even the smallest interaction with a youngster can make a big difference in how they feel and act at school, and uses bus drivers as an example.

"If you open up the bus door and you say something mean, then you've just set the tone for that student. But if you open up the door and you're teaching a skill - and social skills are easy to teach - you're teaching children how to interact with adults."

The workshop also covers conflict resolution. It is not open to the public; it's part of professional development courses offered to union members. *AFT-Washington* says it is expecting the largest turnout in several years for this Saturday's course in Tacoma.