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OPINION: Stopping youth violence of the utmost importance

Douglas A. Wain, YouthAlert! Published 12:35 p.m. CT March 14, 2018



(Photo: Michelle Pemberton / Indy Star)

The best way to stop school violence is to stop all youth violence. That's what school violence is — youth violence. It's part of the youth vs. youth war that exists throughout the world, in or out of school. It makes no difference where a youth loses his or her life, and it makes no difference who that youth is. It cannot happen.

For some reason, many youths have gotten the false idea that they are supposed to do violence to other youths — whether it is in the homes, streets, playgrounds, schools or the battlefields. This is also true when it comes to terrorism. As adults, we have to work with youths to correct this erroneous belief.

Research has shown that all interpersonal violence is intertwined. Just singling out “school violence” seems like non-starter to the problem of school violence. Most youths who are victims of violence experience this violence out-of-school. And self-harm is the center of all violence. We believe any education about violence, bullying and abuse must have reducing self-harm at its core. The sad truth is that most kids hurt themselves.

And much more important than gun legislation is gun education. Youths need to know ALL the information on weapons. Only then can they make a true voluntary choice on them. There no law that says you have to have a gun. I trust youths 100 percent to make the right decisions once they have all the information. This is not only true with weapons, but with everything in a youth's life. What kids don't know can, and does, hurt them.

My biggest worry about peace is that although most people are already peaceful, just one or two people can screw the whole peace thing up for everyone. That's why we have to reach every individual without exception. Most people can be reached, and if we have not figured out how now, I'm sure we will in the future, which means we have to keep on trying.

The way I look at it, the kids I meet are absolutely perfect just the way they are. Unless their behavior includes violence, bullying, or abuse, why change? But when I talk to kids about violence, bullying and abuse, they often say, “It's worse than you know.” I believe kids totally when they say that, and that's what keep me up at night: that we don't fully understand the scope and depth of youth and child problems.

Research, and law officials themselves, have consistently said that enforcement cannot do it alone. In some cases, a law enforcement-only approach can have some unwanted and unintended consequences, like a school-to-prison pipeline for some youths. And the programming or training given to law enforcement is different than what you give teachers or school administrators, which is different from what kind of programming and training students and youths of different ages should receive.

We adults should not presume that we have the skills or moral authority to fix youth violence. We can't even fix adult violence, which represents 50 percent of all violence. All the adults in the world on our best days can only get us halfway to youth peace, or world peace, for that matter.

Youth empowerment is not the answer; youth equality is. Youth equality better represents reality since half of the world's population is under 30 years old. Adults' actions regarding school safety that mostly focuses on adults is sort of talking to the wrong end of the horse. Some of the pending national legislation on school safety has only 6 percent of its funds allocated to direct student services.

Nations are indebted to their youths. Nations wouldn't exist today if youths did not believe in them. I am not sure any nation, or political campaign, could even operate without youths. And how many nations were created, and are sustained, by youths.

Nations, too, need to step up and play their part. Everything matters, and every little bit does help. But let's not be afraid to talk directly, honest and equally to kids. They don't bite.

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