

SOMETHING WE SEEM TO BE NEGLECTING

Saturday
January 12, 2013

There was another school shooting this week, in California this time. From all reports, a student, tired of being bullied, entered the school with a shotgun and opened fire. What sets this one apart from others I've read and heard about is the fact that not only didn't anyone die as a result, but he wasn't randomly targeting people. Instead, he was specifically seeking out only those individuals who'd been bullying him. While this certainly doesn't make his response correct, it does give us something to think about, something I believe we've been neglecting for far too long.

For starters, we live in a society in which we use our words to tell our children what to do, and then use our actions to show them otherwise. In this particular context, I'm referring to our advice to our children to come to someone in a position of authority for help, but then referring to anyone who does as a "rat" or a "snitch." Even worse, we often ostracize those who do, making up clever little sayings like "snitches get stitches," laughing when they get beaten and generally treating them as if they were the ones who were in the wrong and not the person who broke the rules in the first place. While it's certainly true that there are some things that are no one else's business, there are other things which require someone with the courage to speak up, and when that happens, we don't need to refer to the whistle blower as a rat or a snitch, or ostracize him in any way.

As I watched the news coverage unfold, I couldn't prevent the mixed emotions I was having. On one hand, his response was not only illegal, it was also inappropriate. He got off lucky, no one was killed, but prisons are filled with people who weren't so fortunate, and most of them will be quick to tell you how sincerely regretful they are over their actions. However, at the same time, I couldn't help but wonder what kind of torment he must have suffered to push him this far, and perhaps more importantly, why he felt he had to choose this path instead of going to an adult for help. Of course, if he did come to an adult for help and nothing happened, then that's an even worse tragedy. Regardless, in the end, this was clearly something that could have been avoided, but which obviously wasn't.

As the camera crews interviewed the students at the school, one person stood out from the rest. I realize that everyone expresses their grief on their own time and in their own ways, but this girl's face was animated and excited about everything taking place around her. When she spoke, you could hear the barely contained excitement as she described what had taken place, and like most witnesses, most of what she said was filled with rumors and speculations, and possibly even intentionally contrived in order to hog the spotlight. In response to a question from the reporter, she stated that the shooter had a "list" of people he was targeting, people who'd bullied him, implying that there were far more than the 2 people he'd come in there for. (Some news reports stated that they'd learned that he came there seeking out 2 specific individuals, not a list of people.) Then, as if this wasn't enough, she happily added that she might have even been on the list herself, as the shooter had never "liked" her.

Luckily for the others he was hunting, the kid was receptive to what his teacher had to say. He put the gun down and gave himself up. No one else got hurt, and in doing so, he proved what many of us have known all along: that sometimes we just need someone to talk to about our problems, even if that person can't fix them. I don't know why he felt as if he couldn't find someone to talk to before resorting to violence, but I have my suspicions. I believe it has something to do with our our actions contradicting our advice. We constantly preach about how the right thing to do is to tell our problems to an adult, but we neglect to follow this advice up with actions of our own, actions that not only support our advice, but which also set an example. Instead, we constantly label those who come forward with demeaning names like "crybaby" or "coward," or even worse, a "rat" or a "snitch." We ostracize those who've come forward, and at what expense? It's time we follow our advice with appropriate and corresponding actions for the new generation. By doing so, we can ensure that our children feel comfortable with opening up about the problems they're experiencing, and in doing so, they can avoid future bloodshed.

As always, please feel free to leave a post. If you'd like a personal response, my address is listed below, and all inquiries are responded to.

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