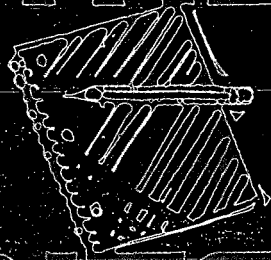


DO THE
WRITING



help
STOP THE VIOLENCE!

**CHALLENGE
PROGRAM
2000**

185617

**VIOL FRIAG
NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO STOP
VIOLENCE**

185617

This compilation of writings was produced by the National Campaign to Stop Violence. For more information on the Campaign's programs and activities, please contact the Campaign at:

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DO THE WRITE THING CHALLENGE

The Do the Write Thing Challenge (*DtWT*) is an initiative of the National Campaign to Stop Violence (NCSV). Founded in 1996, the NCSV is a 501(c)(3) private, non-profit organization composed of business, community and governmental leaders who have come together to reduce youth violence in homes, schools and neighborhoods across the United States.

Based on a successful pilot program that began in Washington, D.C. in 1994, *DtWT* encourages middle school students to discuss and write about youth violence in their communities and to make personal commitments to do something about this problem.

Currently, 18 major localities are active in the *DtWT* program. Each city or county has a local *Do the Write Thing* Committee that oversees and administers the program. Each Committee is a coalition of business, community and government leaders dedicated to reducing youth violence.

During the 2000 school year, more than 36,000 seventh and eighth grade students from 300 middle schools participated in *DtWT*-sponsored classroom discussions about youth violence. More than 9,000 of these students chose to accept the "challenge" by submitting writings to their local *DtWT* Committee and by initiating violence reduction efforts. More than 1,200 "school finalists" were honored at city recognition ceremonies and had their writings published and distributed locally. Two "national finalists" from each participating city were honored at a national recognition ceremony in Washington, D.C. in July of 2000. The writings of these young people have been published and placed in the Library of Congress.

In the past, major funding for the *DtWT* program has been provided by the Kuwait-America Foundation, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Marriott Corporation and Kraft Foods. Additional funding has been provided by a number of foundation and corporate contributors.

HOW DO THE WRITE THING WORKS

At the beginning of each school year, the NCSV invites the superintendents of the school systems in the participating localities to select middle schools to participate in *DtWT* and provides program guidelines to the superintendents, their middle school principals and the appropriate seventh and eighth grade teachers.

Following a classroom discussion about youth violence, participating students are asked to write answers to three questions: How has youth violence affected my life? What are the causes of youth violence? What can I and my community do to reduce youth violence?

A panel of volunteers reviews the students' writings and selects as "school finalists" the boy and girl from each school who submit the most responsive entries. A panel of local "celebrity" readers then reviews the school finalists' writings and selects as "national finalists" the boy and girl school finalists who have submitted the best entries.

Each year, every local *DiWT* Committee publishes a book containing the finalists' writings, and holds a recognition ceremony to honor all of the student finalists and their parents, teachers and principals. The Committee also encourages the formation of groups called Community Peace Partnerships, that work with local government, business and community leaders to provide opportunities such as job training internships, mentoring and academic scholarships for the students who have participated in the program.

A panel of national "celebrity" readers, recruited by the NCSV, reviews the writings of all city national finalists. In past years, this panel has included such dignitaries as the Attorney General of the United States, the United States Secretary of Education and Members of Congress. The panel nominates the two boys and the two girls who have submitted the best entries to serve as "national student spokespeople" for the *DiWT* program. The NCSV also publishes a book containing the writings of all of the national finalists that is placed in the Library of Congress, and holds a national recognition ceremony in Washington, D.C. to honor these students, their parents and their teachers. The national student spokespersons work with the NCSV and the Chairs of the local *DiWT* Committees to focus public attention on youth violence and promising solutions.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE *DO THE WRITE THING* CHALLENGE

Although selected students from the cities participating in *DiWT* receive local recognition from their city *DiWT* Committee and national recognition from the NCSV, *DiWT* is not about winning a prize. It is an essential part of a long-term strategy to help students and adults better understand each other and work together to prevent youth violence.

This year, as a result of the *DiWT* program, thousands of middle school students had an opportunity to candidly discuss youth violence. These discussions stimulated many of the students to formulate their feelings and thoughts into written recommendations for responding to the problem and to make personal commitments to do something to lessen youth violence in their communities.

Teachers participating in *DiWT* report that they are amazed at the openness and honesty of the classroom discussions about youth violence. They also say that these discussions and the writings present excellent opportunities to identify and prevent youth problems before they reach crisis proportions.

The value of the education and dialogue that *DiWT* stimulates - between students, between students and their teachers, and between students and their community leaders - is impossible to quantify, but they are clearly having a positive impact on the communities in which participating students live. In a meeting with the *DiWT* national finalists in Washington, D.C., Attorney General Janet Reno called *DiWT* one of the most promising primary delinquency prevention programs funded by the Department of Justice because it involves kids directly in the development of responses to youth violence in their communities.



The National Campaign to Stop Violence would like to thank the following organizations for participating in the *Do the Write Thing* Challenge Program. We realize that there are many people who worked very hard on this program who may not be listed. We would like to let them know that we greatly appreciate their contributions to the effort to end violence.

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

ABB
Council of the Great City Schools
Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher
Marriott Corporation
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Council of Juvenile & Family Court Judges
National Guard Bureau
The Greater Washington Urban League, Inc.
Kraft Foods, Inc.
Young Astronaut Council

The National Campaign to Stop Violence thanks the U.S. Department of Justice and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention for their continued support of the *Do the Write Thing* Challenge program.



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This fund was established by the Kuwait-American Foundation to honor the American soldiers as peacemakers. The Peace Memorial Fund supports programs that motivate people to reduce violence.

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**DO THE G
WRITE F**



help
STOP THE VIOLENCE!

National Finalists

ATLANTA

Special thanks to the following people who devoted their time and effort to making the *Do the Write Thing* Challenge a success:

ATLANTA DO THE WRITE THING COMMITTEE

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Gloria Patterson

Teachers of National Finalists

LaDonna Smith - Jean Child Young School
Brenda Strothers - L.J. Price Middle School



Taronda Gibbons

L.J. Price Middle School
Grade 7

Atlanta

How Has Youth Violence Affected My Life?

As a twelve year old female, my life has continuously been affected by the violence in my surroundings. All aspects of my life are affected. At one point in my life, I could stay out until after dark, but now I am told to come in before the street lights come on. Not only is my curfew affected, but where I can go is also affected. I would simply like to walk to the corner store, but my parents give me a resounding, "No." After careful consideration, I realized that my parents were protecting me from hostile elements that loomed in the darkness and could harm me if I was found to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

As I stroll down the halls at my school, sometimes I look at the faces that pass me in the hallway; I wonder what is behind those eyes. Do those eyes hide misery and pain? Pain that is waiting to be unleashed in the form of violence. Do those eyes hide an unhappy home life that might erupt into violence at any time?

I reflect on my home life and my nephew who lives with my grandparents and I. He is only six, but already he is violent. At school, he stuck a thumb tack into the leg of a classmate. At six, his school days are filled with stealing, harassment and hurtful acts to his classmates.

You may wonder, as I often have; what would make a six year old so violence.

A child is born with a clean mind. This mind knows nothing of the violent society into which he is coming. Where did we, as a society, go wrong? What is the common factor that changes a 'bundle of joy' into a violent terror? One of the common factor among persons with violent tendencies is the media. Media dispenses a negative message to young people. Media violence, like the United Paramount Networks " WWF Smackdown", makes violence look cool and exciting. Of course, the media does not express the negative aspects or ramifications to the extent it should.

What Are the Causes Of Youth Violence?

While television and the media must take the greatest responsibility, there are other causes. The break down of the family is a huge factor. Many youths come from homes where there is not a mother and a father in the home. Many youths are unsupervised for major part of the day, like the children of Columbine High. An examination of their bedroom revealed a large supply of weapons in full view. Diligent parents may have observed and prevented the massacre. Parents must take an active role in their children's lives. Parents should get to know their children's friends, their

children's hangouts and their children's past times. Diligent parents must never let there be long period of times when they do not know where their children are or what they are doing.

What Can I Do About Youth Violence?

Until now, I have never thought of what I could do about youth violence. As I reflect on youth violence in the my personal life; I have decided that I will do what I can to mediate fights and try to discourage fighting.

I have decided that I will listen more to what is going on around on me. Sometimes youth just need someone to listen to them. When I can, I will give encouragement to other youths who need someone to talk to regarding their problems.

I could also suggest programs, like the "Big Brother and Big Sister" program or other local mentoring groups. These groups really help kids who have problems and need someone to talk to. Sometimes, all that is needed to stop violence is to just feel that someone out there cares. Having a positive force in your life is really a deterrent to stopping violence at any age.

There is hope for the youth of today, but we need to be act now and take positive measures before it is too late.

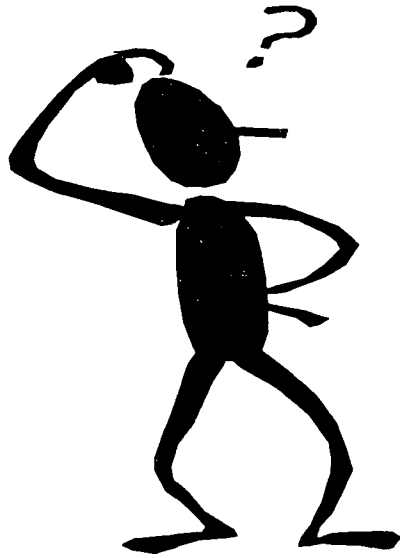


Leo L. Tolin

Young Middle School
Grade 8

Atlanta

“Just Think”



Leo L. Tolin
Young Middle School
Eighth Grade

“Just Think”

As I stand in a dim room knowing that *he* has me right where he wants me, watching the car lights passing through my window, seeing the reflection of the car lights rushing through my walls then onto my face. Just waiting for myself to break, to realize how much my life is ruined. Thinking how deep did I get myself into!

As I lean my back against the walls, the walls that protect my feelings, I say “Think, Think, Think, come on just think”. The pain goes through my brain like thunder hitting the earth surface. I know what *he* wants. *He* wants me to destroy myself completely. The pain that *he* brings has brought me to that point right now to do as so.

My life is nothing. It’s been like this ever since I realized I was nothing and that we lived in a poor environment. Because of violence, both of my grandfathers are dead, soon will be my father, and soon will be me. People tell me I have so much to live for, but is that the truth, or is it another lie they tell us just to live a horrible life?

A life when you go to jail constantly. A life where you have absolutely no one to run to, a life that soon will be taken from you. *He* is strong, real strong but, as I realize, *he* is only strong when you let *him* be strong, I bring the gun down from my head and wipe the tears from my eyes.

Getting up with courage, standing bold and not scared of anything. No more of *his* lies, no more of *his* strength, and no more of *him* getting me where *he* wants me. *He* is the ruler of destruction and disaster. *He* is Violence.

You will be violent if you let *him* bring disaster into your life. Now it’s time. So right now, bring the gun down from your head, and wipe the tears from your eyes and just think.

CHICAGO

Special thanks to the following people who devoted their time and effort to making the *Do the Write Thing* Challenge a success:

CHICAGO DO THE WRITE THING COMMITTEE

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Stephen N. Sehler
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Paul Vallas

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Bobbie Heard

Big Shoulder Catholic Schools

Elaine M. Schuster

Sal Guccione

Teachers of National Finalists

Lucille Chambers - Trumbull School

Karen Gubbins - St. Hilary School



Roberto Coney

Trumbull School
Grade 7

Chicago

Youth Violence has effected my life in many ways. One example is the fact that I can no longer walk the streets at night without the fear of being shot at, beaten up, or stopped by a cop because I'm confused for someone I'm really not. Youth violence today is way out of control. Almost everyday, teens by my house fight outside like cats and dogs not giving a damn about the damage and the pain they can cause not only to the person they're beating up but to the mother that might be seeing her kid getting beat up or seeing his kid come inside his house bleeding. No mom wants to see her son/daughter all beat up, in the hospital, or even dead because of some person's fault, but these things happen everyday and to all of us no matter where you go you're still going to hear about violent teens. Like the Columbine high school incident were several students and even some teachers were killed and that has not been the only school were teens were violent and cruel enough to shoot at others. That's why I say that youth violence is way out of control Now even in a school there's violence. The place where once it was thought that it was the safest place to be is no longer so safe. The parents and the families of all those teens that died were very sad and that made me think what if those parents that were crying were my parents, and I was dead. What pain would they feel seeing me dead, in a coffin? I'd never like that to happen. We have all lost valuable family members. I've lost a cousin that got killed because of a drive by shooting. When I saw my aunt cry and when I saw my cousin in his coffin I got sad and I cried thinking that no longer would his eyes open, and no longer would we play, and no longer would we fight about issues we simply would not agree on. I also thought what if that was me and my mom would be the one that heard the news that her son was shot by a teen with a gun that confused him with some one he really wasn't and right now he was in the hospital with littlr or no hopes of surviving.

All these things and more have taught me that violence is everywhere and that I don't have to prove in thought or act that I am cool by being violent or even joining a gang. I can just be myself and try my best so I can avoid violence and youths who are violent. But not every one thinks like me because not every one has had a life like mine. As a little boy all my family cared for me and like today they always supported me in every thing I ever did. No one tried to make my life miserable. They always talked to me and told me what to do and what not to do. They never hit me ,like I was a sack of potatoes, and they always listened to what I had to say. Those things helped me learn that violence wasn't the only solution but like I said I lived a good life but most teens that are violent were raised in a house were there was always violence and either were probably raised in a house were there parents always fought. These kids learned that violence was the only solution and there was no one to ever tell them what was right and was wrong.

Stopping violence is hard for just one person to do. It takes hard work and a lot of help from people, organizations, parents and police, but even though its hard its not impossible. These people working together to fight violence can accomplish many things. I, for example (with the help of the community and business) can try to make a place were people with violent behaviors can be helped. I can also not join a gang and I can help my friends that are planing to join a gang or if they're already in a gang. But like the other thing I plan on accomplishing I cant do it myself. I need the help of people who are

willing to help others. If people were to help me build a house where violent teens could be helped there would be less violence. There are also ways everyone can stop youth violence by helping your kids now. Not by hitting them but by talking to them and listening to their problems . Don't try hitting your kids if they're too violent it would only make things worse. They'll become more violent, and trust me I'm a teen myself so I know what can make us more violent every time you hit us, punish us, or even lecture us about when " I was a little kid" speech we get mad at you even though we did not show it. I know that parents think that hitting kids will make them a better kid ,but the generations now a days are way different they are not like they used to be. So parents listen to your children like you liked to be heard and talk to them like would like them to talk to you and I bet you that we'll contribute a lot to stopping youth violence.



Rominna Villaseñor

St. Hilary School
Grade 8

Chicago

The Things I See

I am a typical thirteen-year-old girl living in a typical home.
Yet, all the brutality I see and hear makes me want to write this poem.
My unbearable everyday, inevitable life starts out like this,
All the incidents, crisis, problems, violence, and more that you just cannot seem to miss.

As I wake up grumpily in the morning,
I could hear mama and papa incessantly screaming and fighting.
Believe me, for this is my earsplitting alarm clock day after day,
I cannot stop it nor shut it; my words were nothing to them, they do not care what I say.

Although my heart aches and throbs so badly,
I still desperately try to manage to hide my terrible feelings hopelessly.
As I step outside and walk warily to the insecure streets of our little city,
I feel scared, fearful about the gangs that promenade frequently.

At last, I arrived punctually in the place of learning,
Now I could hear the different voices of different people eagerly chatting.
Because of the numerous youth violence happening today,
We now have to go through metal detectors everyday.

My imaginative dreams are all over as well as my naïve days,
Right here reality begins and racism, discrimination, and prejudice I have to face.
At the same time as I walk through the crowded halls of our little school,
I witnessed the brawny kid effortlessly shoves a weaker kid, just to act cool.

This was just the beginning of what I see nowadays regarding violence,
Wait until I tell you the agonizing truth of unjustifiable life of adolescence.
Peer pressure is part of a life of a standard person,
They do not have to give in for many different reasons.

As I was leisurely pacing through the narrow halls in the hallway,
I was thinking about why the brawny kid pushed the helpless kid everyday.
Maybe it's because of peer pressure and stress that he gave in to,
It could be the aggression and brutality that the media exposed us in to.

It could be due to the inequity and racism he went through,
However, he could have at least thought about it for a minute or two.
Perhaps he did it because of his ignorance and narrow-mindedness.
In knowing whom the real person inside really brings unlimited happiness.

Conceivably because he is unaware,
Of what discipline, knowledge, and understanding has to bear
Whatever the blame-worthiness cause is, the heart breaking effect is distressing,
I could have done something with my own modest and meek ways of explaining.

If I could not do it alone, of course there is an adult to help me.
To assist them in knowing how to understand, to realize, to value, and to see.
That if they would help prevent violence, and promote peace,
Then the other students would bring out the best of them and of course feel at ease.

I could have helped the student pick up his bits and pieces,
Although it is small, I still could have made a big difference.
Even so, the least I could do is to not take a part of this malicious dare,
Although I felt guilty and ashamed at myself because I certainly knew it was not fair.

Eight hours of learning passed, at last I am once again set free,
It is time to go back to my home and hear my parents quarrel obstinately.
Hearing them, fight repeatedly just frustrates me,
I am just another frantic juvenile who needs attention and consideration habitually.

Look what that dreadful youth violence has done to the little innocent me...
I know there is a day when I just have to let go because of the violence that I see.
I cannot stop this violent behavior, antagonism, and aggression.
Only if you could help me, together we will fight it through cooperation.

We could still change society's brutal discriminative ways,
Only if you will do the *right* thing, listen, and react; we will stop youth violence some
how...
BUT WHEN?

DENVER

Special thanks to the following people who devoted their time and effort to making the *Do the Write Thing* Challenge a success:

DENVER DO THE WRITE THING COMMITTEE

Chair

George Curtis

Coordinator

Taggart Hansen

Members and Finalist Judges

Pat Foley
Margaret Hurley
Jessica Lee
Marilyn Martinez

DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

Teachers of National Finalists

Terry Frazier - Gove Middle School
Shari Summers - Place Middle School



Emily Broyles

Place Middle School
Grade 8

Denver

dream

The sun has set and I lower my eyes,
At last I focus on a star in the skies,
It twinkles and I'm lost in its incredible glow,
It shines like it has something special to show,
And now it is a new star that I see,
People are screaming, trying to break free,
The star is yellow and is pinned to a shirt,
I see these people know pain and hurt,
I am the officer who can say,
That their lives should continue or end today,
No crime has been committed by the people I see,
Yet they are to be killed – the year's 1943,
With fear in their hearts they walk to their fate,
To a place where fire and poison await...

And now a new road is under my feet,
I am marching with people, shouting in the street,
I know I am yelling and I feel such hate,
When we say we don't want to integrate,
The march has reached the poor side of town,
No more pale faces, all black and brown,
We attack them and I feel their terror,
As they run and pray their last prayer,
Some will come close and some will reach heaven,
The year is 1957...

I blinked for only a moment, but now they're gone,
I hear voices hollering and cheering me on,
Now I am fighting a boy without a name,
Yet we have so much that is the same,
We know fight and not talk, steal and not buy,
But right now we know nothing for we are both high,
My life is smoking, stealing and drinking,
My gang is my home and I fight without thinking,
I grab my gun and blow the boy away,
I know now that this wasn't just play,
Soon lights are flashing and I am rushed into cars,
To live a life hidden by bars,
The jail keeper says I knew what was in store,
The year is 1994...

It isn't the keeper now who is talking,
I turn and see it's with my friend that I'm walking,
He says "Did you hear what happened at Columbine today?
Eric and Dylan killed 13 people they say",
People pointed and shouted at me,
"He knew the killers, that's he!"
Yes, it's true; I'm not one who pretends,
Eric and Dylan were both my friends,
They wanted me to join them, and showed me their gun,
I briskly said no, and away I did run,
I didn't want it to happen and felt sad,
For the people who were hurt by two boys so bad,
That night I closed my eyes and prayed for Columbine,
The year is 1999...

I open my eyes with a terrified scream,
So happy to find it was just a bad dream,
I was so scared and amazed by all I learned,
I never wanted to let anyone be killed or burned,
The star has long faded, but its message is clear,
Violence must stop right now, right here,
Youth violence and drug abuse is growing fast,
We all need to turn and learn from the past,
The best storyteller's time and history,
I have hope for the future, although it's a mystery,
I sigh with a smile, it's a new day,
For I'm a teen and I can stop this today.



Phillip Dorsey

Gove Middle School
Grade 8

Denver

VIOLENCE

Never give up
this is a fight you can win
Because shooting people isn't right
it's a sin
When children are afraid
to play in the street
They're afraid of the people
they might meet
When gangs and drug dealers
take over at night
You just might think
it's a terrible sight
To see so much youth
and life down the drain
You would say that they have lost
their brain
So never give up
don't mess up like they did
And if you grow up
please tell your own kid
There are too many of them
out there you see
So when they ask you
say no not me
This is real life
so wake up won't you please
Get down and pray
on your knees
For the policemen have lost their lives
just for you
for your peers, friends
and family too
There's one thing that I
want you to remember
Never give up
and never surrender.

HARTFORD

Special thanks to the following people who devoted their time and effort to making the *Do the Write Thing* Challenge a success:

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Joanne Ceglarski - Chippens Hill Middle School (Bristol, CT)



James Shurko

Chippens Hill Middle School
Grade 7

(Bristol, CT)

Do The Right Thing

Violence is a horrible thing in itself, but youth violence is worse.

There are many causes of youth violence. The lack of parental concern for their children is one of the biggest causes. Some youths aren't disciplined well. They may be aloud to loiter around dangerous places. Because some people have this much freedom they sometimes get into violent situations. Also parents are too busy to give any attention to their children. For example the parents don't bring their children to, sporting events, concerts, or movies. Some youths don't even get to have a catch with their dads or plant flowers with their moms. This makes them feel unloved. They think that the parents are not interested in them. As a result they turn to violence for attention.

The media also plays a big part in youth violence. Kids and teens always see and here about violence from the media. They see it on T.V and in movies, they here about it on the radio, and they read about it in the newspaper. Because they are surrounded by it youths tend to think nothing of it.

One big factor is put-downs. Some kids like to make fun of other kids. Those kids can only take so much. They become a ticking time bomb. After a while they can't take much more so they explode. These are the three biggest reasons for youth violence.

Youth violence has affected my life in many ways. I have to be very careful. I have to think twice about what I say, because I know that what was supposed to be a frivolous joke can be interpreted as a caustic remark that can trigger violence. I also have to be careful about how you react to others. I have to choose my friends more wisely than before.

Because of youth violence many people's lives are more restricted than before. Teachers can't hit students with rulers anymore. (Thank god) Coaching is more hands off. Games and movies have ratings on them. After the shooting at Columbine I wasn't even allowed to play Golden Eye until I turn 13.

There has also been a significant change of attitude due to youth violence. Some people are nicer, others madder, and some feel grief. Many people are more aware of youth violence now.

There are many ways to prevent youth violence. If I was involved in a conflict with a friend I can talk it over. I could also try to reach an agreement.

Another way that I could prevent youth violence is to listen with an open mind to the other party when they are trying to reason out. Use eye-to-eye contact when you want to get your point across.

A third way to prevent youth violence is to try to get other people involved in camps, scouts, sports, and in other clubs.



Jackie Strong

Quirk Middle School
Grade 7

Hartford

How has youth violence effected my life?
Well, for most people, violence is like a knife.
It cuts through their future and ruins their dreams.
All of this is one of violence's schemes.
It traps you when you are unsteady,
And in many cases, you think that you are ready.
But no one can ever be prepared,
So scared, and yet they say they never cared.
It puts children in hospitals and gangs,
But still, venom is pumping from violence's fangs.
Drugs are taken,
Fights are maken,
Nothing seems to satisfy violence's thirst for trouble,
And for you it does nothing, just leaves you in a muddle.
For me, it effects me greatly, all that bluffing,
Even though I have no business where the cops are cuffing.
I can not help but feel pity
For those who have lost that bitty, bitty
Tinny whinny shred of hope
Because they feel that they can not cope.
They have been lead the wrong way,
And where they are, their troubles will never be at bay.
They act as though they are big and strong,
Although, inside, they know they were wrong.
And most of the time, the people around them are disgusted,
Because they know that the ones talking are busted.
And we all know that it makes them feel better
To make the ones around them, as they say, feel like cheddar.
A hit at school,
They think makes them look cool.
And it only makes me understand
That they don't have a sturdy place to land,
Because, anywhere they go, they don't feel protected,
Maybe because in past times, they were neglected.
In fights, the purpose is to find the "king of the rock,"
And with their fears, they have to put on a double lock.
And it is stupid to fight,
Because with a solution like that, you can tell that neither are right.
And in this case, violence is the pollution,
And its goal is for you to find the wrong solution.
And how does this venom hurt me, you ask?
Well, it doesn't make learning an easier task.
Classmates being loud in class and interfering with our learning,
It starts my inner fire burning.
Disobeying the teacher and making rude comments,
It makes my classmates look as if they have no sense.

Violence doesn't have to be physical you see,
But this is verbal violence done to me.
The teacher can't teach when the class is distracted,
They could teach better if the troublemaker hadn't acted.
And all I can do is tell them to shut up,
Or give them a look like cuffing a pup.
This is how I can get in touch with how angry I could get,
And I could lose self-control like them, I bet.
But unlike them, I have a place to land,
So I can keep my anger canned.
There, I can tell how I feel, and I know I am secure,
This is the thing that they are lacking, I'm sure.
Solutions abound,
They can be found
If you know what to look
And if you don't have to have a secret nook.
One answer is to make children at a young age understand
That anger can be cooled and doesn't have to be fanned.
They should know that they don't always have to be right,
And talking instead of fighting makes it easier to see the light.

HOUSTON/HARRIS COUNTY

Special thanks to the following people who devoted their time and effort to making the *Do the Write Thing* Challenge a success:

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Debra King - Aldine Middle School



Devell Blanton

Ezekiel W. Cullen Middle School
Grade 8

Houston

TEENAGE VIOLENCE, MOST PERSONAL

Do you know what it feels like to wake up bruised and broken? Do you know what it feels like to wake up and not be able to see or move even the slightest inch without feeling pain that is so terrible to describe? You try to open your eyes to see but realize that your eyes are open but you are not able to focus or see. You can't hardly breathe because someone has stuffed cotton or something up your nasal passages. You want to ask what happened but you feel that you are all alone. You try to remember what happened but the last thing you remember is going to sleep. What happened? Where is your family?

Someone enters the room. You hear your mother's voice and you are so happy. You want to reach out to her and hug and kiss her and ask what happened? You realize that someone is with her. They are talking about a terrible accident and someone died. Who died? No, it can't be true! Your dad, your older sister, and your grandmother are gone. How could such a terrible thing happen?

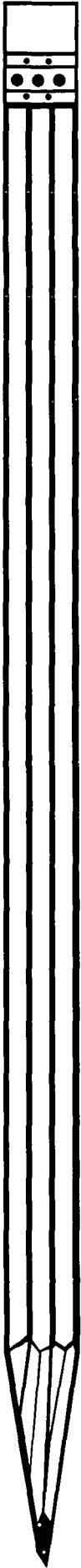
Your sister is only thirteen and she is so kind and nice. She could not possibly be dead! She is only a child that should have the majority of her life ahead. You listen and pray that you are having a bad dream. You want to wake up. You want to see your father. You want your father to hold you in his lap and tell you he will always love you. You want him to call you his baby. Please God, let me wake up you scream. You realize that you have not spoken and no one is aware you are awake.

You are having a nightmare that will stay with you for the rest of your days. A nightmare that will cause your mom to sit silently and cry for years and years to come. You will see many tears shed for the lost of your family. You realize that your mom has lost a mother, a husband, and a daughter. How will she ever be happy again? How will any of your family ever really be truly happy again? You have lost a sister, a playmate, and a friend. Physically your body will heal. You will have facial scars for the rest of your life, but they will eventually look minor. Your broken leg will mend. What about your broken heart? What happened? Why did it happen? Who is to blame?

You learn that a car of five teenagers were drinking and getting high when they hit your family's car head on. Two teenagers died. The teenager driving the car will be charged with involuntary manslaughter. Others will possibly be charged with using illegal substances. Five families plus your family have all been torn apart because of a senseless act of teenage violence. Oh yes, its teenage violence, of the personal kind.

Most people only think of teenage violence as acts such as drive-by shooting, or beating or killing, or breaking and entering, or stabbing. The teenagers in that car, that evening, used their car to commit an act of violence against your family. Drugs and alcohol played an important role in this senseless act. Where did they get the drugs and alcohol? Both substances should have been off limit to teenagers yet a storeowner sold them the alcohol and they bought the drugs from another teenager at their school. Why? Laws are not always enforced. Some people are only interested in making money. Teenagers think they are too young to be prosecuted. Whatever the reason, teenage violence must stop!

I am very popular at my school. My peers look up to me. They watch what I do and the manner in which I behave. I know I am a role model, therefore I will always, at all time, serve as a good role model for others. I realize that I am only one, but I can make sure that I do not allow others to sway me to do wrong. I never know who may be watching me and waiting to imitate me. I will not use drugs. I will not drink alcohol. I will not indulge in teenage sex. I will not join a gang or participate in gang related acts of violence. I will encourage others to do the right thing at all time. I will be a positive role model for others and hope that all teenagers will commit to stopping the violence.



Bianca Flores

Aldine Middle School
Grade 7

Houston

Exactly, what is going on around us?
many things, actually. One sunny afternoon on
the news they reported a story about two
high school boys found dead in an alley. They
showed pictures of them and of two crying
families. I know I recognize them; it just
hurts too much to recall everything that has
happened in the past. There was some information
they didn't cover because of the lack of knowledge
they had about why these two boys ended here. I
do, though, and so does my journal for I wrote
everything that started this sad tragedy. Now I
can show you what I went through when my family
and I encountered situations with both youth violence
and drug abuse through some entries of my journal.

I had an older brother, Jack. Jack along
with his friend, David, used drugs.

January 18, 1998

Dear journal,

Today, I overheard Jack's phone
conversation with David. At David's house
things aren't going so well; it turns out his
family has been going through tough times for awhile
now. His father, David's, has been hitting his mom
for quite some time. Soon, that wasn't enough,
and he's hitting David now, for any reason.

- Bye!

January 20, 1998

Dear Journal,

David's father keeps hitting them violently;
he often hits him with anything he can reach or get a

hold of. For no apparent reason, he gets mad and takes out his anger on him.

- Bye

What David's father was doing is an example of youth violence. David had many options he could've taken. First, he could've called a hotline which specializes in this type of situations. There are many hotlines he could've called to report this abuse; someone who cares would and will be on the other end of the line waiting for him or anyone who has this problem to call in. She will be able to help you through this situation. Therefore, David would not have to suffer his dad's outrages.

Another thing he could've done was talked to his counselor, teacher, or some kind of authority figure, either one of them would be able to help him.

Instead, David turned to drugs or as he called it his refuge. His refuge from all his problems.

Eventually, David got Jack to join him. Slowly, Jack and David started skipping school to use drugs. Not knowing it, they became addicted to it. Whenever they had a chance, they bought drugs.

We had noticed some changes in Jack's behavior and some drops in his grades.

February 2, 1998

Dear Journal,

Jack has been acting very weird lately. He doesn't talk much. He's never home. When he is home, he locks himself in his room all the time.

- Talk to you later.

February 4, 1998

Dear Journal,

I can't understand why Jack has become so aggressive towards mom, dad, and me.

- Talk to you later.

February 7, 1998

Dear Journal,

Today, I was doing the laundry, and I came across a package of white powder in Jack's pants. I showed it to mom and dad. Nothing good came out of my discovery.

- Talk to you later.

Pretty soon, David and Jack were abusing drugs. Their body had become used to the drugs, so they were constantly using them. A couple of times, they over did it and ended up in the hospital.

Maybe our parents weren't sure of what they could do to stop this problem from getting worse. They could've done many things like enrolled Jack in a rehabilitation program, slowly he would get off of drugs with this medical help which has helped many people.

Or they could've faced the root of the problem, David. They could've separated Jack from David.

David was the one who introduced Jack to drugs and insisted he should take them. Slowly, separated from David, Jack would've been able to stay away from drugs with the help of a guide or mentor.

Instead, all they did was beg and pray Jack would change his mind about doing drugs. Unfortunately, Jack didn't change his mind, and he continued to use them. Every time he did it tore our family apart.

February 17, 1998

Dear Journal,

Today, I found my mother crying in the kitchen. It breaks my heart each time I see this. My father doesn't talk at all; he only sits in front of the television and watches. To think this is all happening because of Jack's drug addiction. Not only is he hurting himself, but he is also hurting our family. I didn't see Jack today at all.

- Later.

February 28, 1998

Dear Journal,

Jack hasn't been home at all for quite some time. I'm scared.

- Later, I hope I will have better

March 13, 1998

Dear Journal,

We still hadn't been able to find Jack. Today, though, it finally happened, what we all feared. We saw it on the news. They found Jack and David. Dead.

Because of youth violence, David got Jack too drugs. He hoped it would make his problems go away, and they did. However, it was only temporary. Once the effect of the drugs were gone, the problems returned once more. Jack's death is the result of drug abuse. You can see how youth violence turns to drug abuse and how it affected my life because of Jack and David's problems. However, now that I think about it, it was also

our problem because we didn't know how to handle this. Thanks to me, you are now aware of many things you can do if you happen to encounter one of these situations. Many things can be done to reduce youth violence around your neighborhood. If you know youth violence is occurring somewhere, please don't hesitate make the call. It is **NOT** your fault if someone is abusing you. Please take my advice and report this. Drugs are harmful things. If you or someone you know does drugs get help or get them help. There will always be someone who can help you.

Always remember my sad story, all the advice I have given you, and try to make sure it doesn't happen again.

LAS VEGAS

Special thanks to the following people who devoted their time and effort to making the *Do the Write Thing* Challenge a success:

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LAS VEGAS PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

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Traci Spencer - Greenspan School



Takara Green

Sandy Valley Middle School
Grade 8

Las Vegas

Violence in Society

The influence of youth violence and drugs becomes increasingly harder to combat each day. As a teen in the twenty-first century, I find myself being tempted more and more by what the world has to offer, some of which are not always good. My parents are afraid to send me to public school because of the numerous shootings occurring there. Metal detectors guard the doors and restrict privacy; video cameras watch the students' every move. Options we previously had as students have been taken away due to the violence present in all of our lives.

One major cause of violence is drugs. People get caught up in the illusion that drugs will give you all that you are lacking, so people are willing to do anything to get and keep drugs. Certain drugs make you lose control, or they become addictive. The need to assuage a craving caused by these addictive drugs can compel individuals to engage in violence and hurt others to obtain what they need. Different factors that are believed to influence the choice to do drugs are stress, the need to belong, peer pressure, low self-esteem, and not knowing the consequences of taking drugs.

Not knowing how to peacefully express anger is dangerous for the angry person and the people around them. In venting their rage, they may hurt someone. Being violent when you are angry will not only complicate a bad situation, but it can also easily affect the future in bad ways.

The following are other examples of causes of violence. Children often see their elders hit, scream, and argue with each other. They see people on TV, movies, or in other forms of entertainment engaging in acts of violence. The people around them say, "Cool!" or "That's neat!" . People should not be as violent as the actors and actresses seen in the movies or on TV. They are just playing roles.

There are many ways of dealing with youth violence. We can attempt to solidify today's moral foundation by putting more emphasis on the church. Boosting the self-esteem level of today's teens would probably help; most teenagers continually put themselves down because they do not have perfect acceptance from everyone and for everything. Adults and kids should have more interaction in each others lives. Most families see each other for about 9 hours a day, sometimes less. Programs like the Boys and Girls' Clubs of America, D.A.R.E., Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and the Great American Smokeout should be prominent in the school curriculum, parks, and popular hangouts of teens. These programs occupy their time, which means they will not be sitting around waiting for some negative influence to catch their attention. The youths involved in these programs learn, develop relationships, and have fun at the same time.

Finally, if I, know someone who is having problems with violence, caused by drugs or otherwise, I can try to help them by telling someone I trust to get help, a teacher, counselor, parent, or peer mediator. I could also just listen and offer my suggestions if the person is open to them.



Paul Scott
Greenspan School
Grade 7

Las Vegas

THE FIST OF RAGE

Violence has hit many families in the past decade. Some families were hit harder than others. One thing is for certain, we can not let violence rage into this decade, nor all the ones to follow. Violence is a fist of rage controlled by a wrist of hate.

A teen in my community in Memphis, TN committed suicide. I did not know this kid, but I am sure it was hard on his family. This is one way teen violence has affected my life. The action that this person took was probably fifty percent out of rage and fifty percent out hate. This family was taken down hard by a powerful hit.

I believe that the arm that this fist is attached upon is a combination of movie writers and video game makers who could both use a little less blood and gore in there line of work. They have rage and violence in movies so teens think it is O.K. to have it in real life. That is the thought shared with many overly violent teens all over the U.S. and the rest of the world. Without the arm the fist would be rendered helpless.

To stop this angry fist before it hits once again, I could write a letter to the federal government and tell them to set up a place were teens could go for free and just hang out. It would be like the All American Sports Park except it would be for free. This place would have center of counselors to help depressed, angry, or hateful teens. In setting up a place like this it would illuminate an extremely large percentage of youth violence, by getting kids off the streets and into the overseeing of many caring adults. Giving this fist a glove instead of a gun would greatly decrease the amount of teen deaths.

Violence is still raging through out all streets of the U.S., and the rest of this world. We can still put a stop to this fist of rage. Even though violence continues to strike

THE FIST OF RAGE

**of our cruel ones that resemble beings of hate and anger. Now you know why violence is
a fist of rage controlled by a wrist of hate**

LOS ANGELES

Special thanks to the following people who devoted their time and effort to making the *Do the Write Thing* Challenge a success:

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Doris M. Dillard

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Diana Goyett - Marina del Rey Middle School



Jasmina Aragon

Emerson Middle School
Grade 7

Los Angeles

Smiley

Violence can come close to ruining lives, and sometimes it does ruin lives. We can find violence almost everywhere we go, in the streets, at home, on TV, and sometimes even in our own homes.

In the streets, we see people beating each other up, in schools kids get into fights. And with all these kids killing each other and shooting up the schools, it's even worse than it used to be. And on TV, we see people fighting and killing each other, but we can't blame all violence on the media either, because sometimes even in our homes parents beat their kids, and sometimes even each other. Last, we ourselves make the wrong choice to do violence.

There is peer pressure. Some kids pressure other kids to get in fights with someone they dislike. They say it's okay to get in fights with other kids if that kid looks at you the wrong way, or does or says something to you.

Sometimes kids join gangs, and gangs lead to violence, drugs and other negative things that will ruin lives.

I know that violence can come close to ruining lives because there was a girl, we'll call her Smiley for now. When she was in the 5th grade, her big sister joined a gang, which introduced Smiley to the bad crowds. Smiley started hanging around with future gang members. Her best friend was already in a gang, her best friend, Crazy, introduced her to the rest of the gang. A few days after meeting the gang, Smiley started thinking it would be better if she joined the gang too, so Crazy told the rest of the gang and they decided Smiley could join when she started 6th grade.

When she did start the 6th grade, she found out that the new members of the gang went to the same school. The problem was that when they said she could get in the gang they gave her 2 ways to get in. She had to find 3 girls she disliked and beat them up, or have the gang beat her up. Smiley picked beating up 3 girls. When she beat the 3rd girl up she almost got caught by the school police, but she joined the gang anyway.

When Smiley was in the gang, she started doing bad stuff. She would stay up late with her friends without her parents' permission. She started skipping school, going to house parties, and going to stores and stealing. But the main thing the gang was based on their reputation, their reputation was they wouldn't take anything from no one. They would beat up anyone who would look at them wrong, say or do anything to them they thought was wrong.

One day Smiley and the gang were walking down the street and a rival gang

pointed at them, talked and laughed at them, so they got in a fight right there in the street. Her gang sent Smiley to fight a girl that was at least 3 years older than she was. But someone must have called the cops, because they arrived a few minutes later. The police had to stop 3 fights that were going on at the same time. They almost couldn't stop the fights.

Time went by and Smiley got a reputation for beating up people too. But fortunate for her she had to move. Although at the time, she thought it was unfortunate. She moved at the beginning of the 2nd semester for the 6th grade. When she started school, she started as a good girl to give the idea that she was a good student. But at the beginning of the 7th grade, she got involved with another gang, again. This time it was a big gang that involved drugs, violence, and other big gangs, rival gangs. The worse thing was that her gang had trouble with another gang that we'll call the "Fayteen." They always looked for trouble with Smiley's gang.

One day while she was walking to school, Smiley happened to bump into a girl from another rival gang, and Smiley and the girl started to fight. Smiley knew the girl was older and bigger than she was, but that didn't stop her. In a few minutes Smiley was on the ground covered with blood. She was left in an alley. Minutes passed, which felt like hours to her, and then she saw her best guy friend, Evil, standing over her.

Evil took her to his home, and she spent the night there. The next day Smiley was planning on how to get revenge, she planned to beat the girl up real bad. She knew she couldn't do it on her own so she called her "home girls." They went over to Evil's house and planned it all out. When it came time to jump the girl, Smiley felt bad, but she did it anyway. The problem was one of her "home girls" had a pocket knife and stabbed the girl. Smiley tried to stop her but couldn't. The girl almost died, and she will carry the scars for life. It was a terrible time for the girl and Smiley.

Her parents were always trying to do the best for her, but Smiley didn't appreciate it until one day she almost lost both her parents when a guy from a rival gang started shooting up her house. She knew then she had to get out of the gang, but when she told them they were not very happy. They beat her up so bad that for days you couldn't recognize her.

Smiley never did get out of the gang, but she's always trying. The problem is for her to keep her family safe so she has to be with the gang regularly and act like she never asked to get out.

You might wonder how I know so much about Smiley. The answer is that I am Smiley, and I am telling about my life. I have made some mistakes and I have caused other people to get hurt. I have caused problems for my family. I am trying to turn my

life all the way around.

I work hard in school and get good grades. My parents know I am trying to change and they have learned to trust me. I think about being free of the gang all the time, and the best thing I can say to anyone is NEVER get involved with gangs, drugs, and violence of any kind. Many people in gangs and out of gangs never learn that, but I am glad that I did. And I am glad to tell you NEVER GO THE VIOLENT WAY. YOU WILL REGRET IT IF YOU DO.



Raul Perez

Marina del Ray Middle School
Grade 8

Los Angeles

!STOP!

"Wee-ow, wee-ow" the sirens were going like crazy again at Josh's neighborhood. Josh Carpenter was 16 and lived with his mom and his little 5 year old brother, Tommy Carpenter, at a run down old apartment building in the south side of L.A. That was all their mother could afford. Their father died when Josh was 10 and it hasn't been the same ever since. Josh and Tommy were really close and Josh would do anything just for his brother to be happy.

"Ring, ring!" the phone rang and Tommy knew that it was another call from Josh's gangster friends.

"So Josh, are you coming or do I have to go over there and get you myself?" asked Kevin. Kevin was the leader of the Riderz, a gang that owns Josh's neighborhood, and didn't leave Josh alone.

"No, I'm coming. Just wait a little while longer." Josh didn't want Kevin to come over because he was concerned about the safety of his little brother.

He hung up and went to put his jacket on that he stole from a nearby Macy's store. He tied his red bandana over his neck to symbolize he was part of the Riderz. He went to tell his mom that he was going out again. They started to argue because Josh was always leaving the house. He didn't care, he stormed off, but before he turned the knob of the front door, he went over to Tommy.

"This is for you Tommy. I know how much you like Scooby-Doo, so I got you a necklace of him."

"Thanks a lot J.C. I love you." said Tommy with so much joy filling up in his heart. Josh left.

"Tommy, honey, put your shoes on. We have to go to the market," his mom ordered him.

Josh met the Riderz in the middle of the street. Kevin told him that there was going to be a gang fight between their rivals, Jetz. Kevin handed Josh a gun. By the expression on his face, he didn't like this one bit.

The Jetz came and Josh was told to go hide behind a bush and sneak fire on them. The shots began to be fired and you could hear the bangs across the neighborhood. Bullets flying everywhere. Hitting car windows, making car alarms go off. Hitting pots of flowers, trash cans, house windows and some actually hitting some of the gangsters. Then "POW" there is silence. Josh could only hear the sirens of the police coming to the rescue. Josh doesn't come out from behind the bush because he doesn't want to be found. He already has two strikes and one more means jail. He waits till everything settles down and gets up and pretends he was just walking by. Then something catches his eye, a shiny object. He realizes what it is and he feels like he's been stabbed a hundred times. It is Tommy's Scooby-Doo necklace all covered in blood. Josh's mind is confused and scared. He quickly gets a ride from an officer. He goes to the hospital and finds the room his brother is in. He also finds his mom crying her heart out. The doctors tell Josh that Tommy has been shot in the head and has a 25% chance of living. Two hours later the devastating news hits Josh. Tommy died. Josh's body feels like it is falling apart and he wants to cry until he explodes. He runs out into the rainy world, hitting every meter he sees, thinking that the pain from his bloody knuckles would cure him. Josh makes his way to church, his first time ever. He prays and fall asleep on the pew.

Josh woke up huffing and puffing and all sweaty on his bed. He got up and ran to his brother's room. He went to the side of Tommy's bed and put his hand on Tommy's forehead. He rubbed it gently and whispered, "I'm sorry little bro, I'll stop, I promise." He kissed him gently and leaned over to make sure Tommy's Scooby-Doo necklace didn't fall over the counter. And he was glad the nightmare was over.

Youth violence has affected all of us in one way or the other. You might be thinking that you haven't been affected but you haven't finished your life and you don't know what is in store for you. Violence is everywhere, in the T.V., by t.v. stations trying to get high ratings, in video games, by

companies who want more people to buy their games, and mainly in our streets, by drive-by's, gangsters fights over territory, bank robberies, bomb threats, and even in sports games where players lose their tempers.

I ignore violence but it is not easy when it is everywhere I turn. Everybody has one chance in life to make the right decisions, but there are people that get two chances, I guess those are the lucky ones. There are two choices in life, you could be like Kevin in the story, a gang member who doesn't have a chance in life or like Josh, who quit being a gangster and made something out of himself, who now lives in Beverly Hills and enjoys the smile on Tommy's face. It's up to you. I just wish we could stop.

MIAMI

Special thanks to the following people who devoted their time and effort to making the *Do the Write Thing* Challenge a success:

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Esther Withers - South Miami Middle School



Vanessa Butler

Nautilus Middle School
Grade 8

Miami

Growing Up (No More Pain)

At first my life started out fine. I had an average life. I lived with my mama, daddy, and my two brothers. When I was ten, my mama passed away so my daddy tightened his grip on me. Daddy became an alcoholic and started to abuse me. My brothers went to live with my grandma. I wasn't allowed to go because I was "Daddy's Baby." Whenever my friends had a party, I wasn't allowed to attend. Daddy was sure that there was going to be "Male Species" there. I guess when Daddy started to abuse me, I went wild.

I'm five-feet-two, a baby-brown color skin with long sandy-brown curly hair. I guess you can say that I'm pretty with a good attitude. At least that's what everyone said.

By the time I entered Middle School, all the boys wanted to be my boyfriend. I turned all of them down because, there was this one high school boy that I had my eyes on and that all the girls were after. He finally made his move on me.

"Wassup Jasmine?"

"Wassup."

"You heard about that dance at my school?"

"Yeah, what about it?"

"I still need a date."

"And...." I said playing hard to get. "All those girls who like you and you can't need a date?"

"Maybe I don't wanna go with them." He said. "Maybe I already have my eyes on a girl but maybe she's trying playing hard to get. Maybe she need to stop frontin."

Joseph is five-feet-nine, a dark-brown complexion with a huge Afro. He has hazel eyes with a smile that teases girls' mind. He was all that and a bag of chips.

"Who frontin?" I said, already knowing that he was referring to me.

"You know who I'm talking about." He said. "So, wassup?"

"I'll let you know tomorrow." I said walking away.

"Why not now?" He asked catching up.

"Cause, I have to go." I said picking up my pace.

"I'll walk with you." He said picking up his pace also.

I ignored him so we walked in silence.

"What's yo answer girl? I don't have all day."

"Well...Bye then." I said.

"Okay, okay, okay." He said grabbing my arm gently. "I have all day when it comes to you."

I Smiled. "Okay. I'll go." I said still smiling.

"You sho?" He asked

"Yeah, I'm sho. Tomorrow, walk me home and you'll find out more info."

"I don't walk, I drive and besides, aint yo daddy tight?"

Yeah but o'well."

"Aight." He said. "Bye."

"Bye." I said turning to leave.

N24

“What did you and Joseph talk about?” Diamond asked later on on the phone that day.
“Stuff.” I said.
“Like what?”
“Like, the Valentines Day dance at his school.” I said smiling.
“Forreal?”
“Yep and he giving me a ride home tomorrow after school.”
“What about me?”
“Oh, yeah.” I said remembering that Diamond and me walk home together every day.
“He’ll give you a ride. I’ll make him.”
“Okay.” She said.
“I have to go.” I said. “Bye.”
“Bye.” She said hanging up the phone.

The next day after school, I met Diamond in her class.
“Common, lets go.” I told her because she was taking too long.
“Okay.”
Diamond and me walked downstairs and then out to the parking lot together.
“Wassup.” Joseph said as me and Diamond approached ~~the~~ Joseph, his car and his boy’z.
“Sup, ready to go?” I asked.
“Lets go.” He said climbing in the car.
When he said that, all five of his boy’z got in the backseat.
“Hold up. What about Diamond?” I said before I got in.
“What about her?” Joseph said from the inside of the car.
“This is my bestfriend. I walk with her home everyday and I told her that you’ll give her a ride home.”
“It’s not good to make promissing’s that you can’t keep.” He said.
“What are you trying to say?” I said looking in the car getting serious.
“You coming or not?” He changed the subject.
“Answer my question.” I said.
“Diamond can’t fit back there, can she?” He asked looking back.
“I’m walking.” I said closing the door.
“Bye.” Joseph said ready to pull off.
I turned around and me and my bestfriend headed home.

The next day (Saturday), Joseph called my house.
“Jasmine, I’m sorry.” He said right after I picked up the phone.
“How’d you get my number?” I asked him.
“Don’t worry about that, I’m sorry. I was high.”
“Whatever.” I said wanting to tell him to come over to my house.
“Believe me, please.”
“Okay.” I told him.
We talked. We talked a lot. Mainly about how much he liked me. He told me that he had called Diamond and apologized also. After our conversation, we started to date. He was my boyfriend that I had learned to love and trust. Atleast I that’s what I thought. How can you learn to love and trust somebody at the age of fourteen?

2 Years Later

One day, my daddy was drinking too much and took all his frustrations out on me. He abused me so bad that I had a blackeye. That was the only damage but I was still pissed at him. Joseph told me that if I was ever fed up with Daddy and needed a place to live, I could come stay with him. Joseph was only seventeen years old but he had his own place. Calling Joseph was the biggest mistake.

When Joseph arrived, he helped me pack my things. My daddy was sleep but because of all the noise, he woke up. He saw everything that we were doing.

“What in the world is this punk doing here Jasmine?” Daddy asked looking from Joseph to me.

“He helping me pack. What does it look like?” I said with a straight face and about to laugh because I couldn’t believe I had the guts to say that.

“You watch yo mouth.” Daddy said pointing his finger at me.

“Hey pops, where yo hands going.” Joseph said getting in the middle of me and Daddy.

“Hold up, this is my daughter. You don’t tell me what to do with my daughter.” Daddy said looking at Joseph with a mean look.

“I don’t...”

“Like I said, when you get a daughter, you do what you want to her and not mine.” Daddy said cutting him off.

“Whatever, Jasmine, you coming or not?” Joseph asked.

“I...”

“Jasmine aint going no where.” Daddy said cutting me off.

“Shut Up.” Joseph screamed at Daddy. “Jasmine, you coming or what?”

“Yeah.” I said.

“You leaving me?” Daddy asked lowering his voice. “After all I’ve done for you and you’re leaving me? Go ahead, get yo things, everything and get out. Don’t ever come back, Never. Stay with this hoodlum all you want, don’t enter my life again. You hear me?”

“Fine!” I said with a straight face. “I wont. Trust me.”

I moved in with Joseph. Everything was great. I loved him (atleast I thought I did) and he loved me (atleast I though he did). Joseph and my life were wonderful. We shared so many great moments together that I wished I had moved out right after my mama died. Everything was like this for one year and by the second year, things took a different route.

“Jasmine, dinner ready yet?” Joseph called walking in the door.

“No.” I yelled back. “I’ll call you back.” I said into the phone to Diamond.

“Okay, Bye.”

“Bye.”

“Why dinner aint ready?” Joseph asked entering my room with his face bald up.

“Cause. I was painting my toes. You like?” I asked getting up.

“Didn’t I tell you to cook?”

“Joseph, don’t get mad.” I said walking up to him and about to kiss him.

“Don’t touch me.” He said angrily and grabbing my arms with a tight grip.

"Look." I said looking down. "We can go out to eat. Why cant we eat Burger King or something?"

"Cause." He said raising his voice. "I don't want to. I wanted to come home and find food on the table that I can eat."

"Okay." I said backing up. "God! I'll go."

"Don't go now." He said tightening his grip on my arm.

"Joseph, you hurting my arm." I said in a whining voice.

"You think I care?" He asked screaming and pushing me down on the bed.

"Ow, Joseph." I said, crying now. "You made me hit my head."

"I don't care!" He screamed while throwing things around the room, mostly at me, most hitting me. "When I tell you to do something, you do it. I don't want to hear no more about yo toes. No more. This is it." He continued, walking out of the room.

I lay in bed and continued crying. When all my tears were dried out, I cleaned up the mess that he had made. After all the trouble, I was sure that he was very sorry, therefore, I still loved him.

"Good morning."

"Hey." I said entering the kitchen after I woke up.

"Look Jasmine, I'm sorry. I was mad, the boss got on my nerves. I would never do anything to hurt you. Please Jasmine," he said coming closer. "Please believe me. I love you."

When he got to my face, I said,

"I love you. I know you are sorry but, tell me when you're mad. I don't want to get hurt no more. Okay?"

"Okay." He said coming closer as we kissed. "I have to work today. I cooked you breakfast but I have to go. I'm out."

"Bye." I said.

"Bye. I love you." Joseph said closing the door behind him.

"He did?" Diamond asked on the phone later on that day. I had told her everything, from top to bottom.

"Yea, but today when he left for work, he told me how much he loved me and that he was sorry."

"And...?" Diamond asked. "You dumb. You'll be better off with yo Daddy."

"I made the right move. All my Daddy know what to do is beat me."

"Joseph too. Whenever he tells you to do something, you do it. He also have you spooked."

"I don't do everything he say." I said getting angry at Diamond. "He don't have me spooked."

"Yes he do. When he got home yesterday, you were quit to hang up with me. Right?"

"Whatever. I don't do everything though."

"Bet."

"Bet."

"Yesterday, when you didn't cook, he started to hit you."

"O'well."

"It aint no 'O'well'. You need to dump him."

"Where am I gone go?"

"Here. My mama already said that you are welcomed to stay if you want."

"I know but, I like it here."

"Whatever."

"What time is it?" I asked.

"Seven-o'clock."

"I have to go. Joseph gone be here in a lil'bit." I said. "Bye."

"Bye spooked."

"I aint spooked but bye." I said hanging up the phone.

As the day's turned into weeks and the weeks into months, the abuse go stronger. He beat me over stupid stuff. The more and more he hit me, the more and more Diamond despised him. She even tried to call the police on him once but because of my lying and saying that she lied, she had no evidence so the police had to drop the case. Because of her calling the police, he beat me even more, certain that I told her to do it. After he had done all his apologies, he asked me to spend the night in his room.

"Jasmine, we have been going together for about five years and you act like you scared to be near me or sleep in my room."

"I don't want to." I said.

"Why?" He asked.

" 'Cause, You don't want me to just sleep in your room and you know that. You want to take my virginity away."

"Naw, I just want you to sleep in here."

" Okay. Just don't be expecting anything."

That night, I spend the night in his room. As much as I said I wouldn't, I lost my virginity to Joseph. Luckily, I didn't get pregnant. I was only sixteen.

1 Year Later

Joseph and I continued to sleep together. This was a big mistake. He started to take more advantage of me.

"Did it hurt the first time?" Joseph asked.

"No but, I don't want to do it. Joseph God! Leave me alone."

"No. You living under my roof, you'll do as I say."

Joseph grabbed me by my arm and dragged me into his room.

"Joseph, stop!" I screamed.

"Shut up." He screamed back at me.

I kept screaming for him to stop. He didn't listen. He kept dragging me, bumping my head, burning my back on the rug, until we reached his room.

"You do what I tell you to." He screamed. "Shut up."

He threw me on the bed by my arms. All that screaming didn't pay off. No body heard (atleast that's what I thought) because no one bothered to save me. When I landed on the bed, he jumped on top of me. I tried my best to fight him off but it didn't work. That day, Joseph forced himself onto me and that day, I was raped.

“Didn’t I tell you to leave that punk alone.” Diamond said at the hospital later on that day.

“Let me rest Diamond. I love you so much for coming, for being here, for being a real friend but...”

“But what?” She asked cutting me off. “This retard put you in the hospital. Jasmine, don’t you think that’s far enough? Please, you’re my bestfriend, I want you to come stay with me.”

“Yeah it is. I was caught up. I’m sure he won’t do it again. Next time, it’ll...”

“Next time?” Diamond screamed cutting me off. “It shouldn’t be a next time. Joseph could’ve killed you. Whats yo problem?”

“Diamond, I know he’s sorry.”

“You dumb. Are you trying to say that you are going to stay with him?”

“ Yeah. I am.”

Diamond stayed ten minutes after our conversation. She left because Joseph came and of her hate for him she wouldn’t let herself stay. He learned to hate her also.

2 Months Later

“Why are you crying?”

“Diamond. I went to the hospital today.”

“And...?” She asked.

“The doctor said something.”

“Like what? When you go to the hospital, the doctor always say something.”

“He said that I was two months pregnant.” I said crying.

“Oh God!” Diamond said under her breath. “Do he know?” She asked sounding like she was ready to cry also.

“No. I’m scared.”

“Oh God!” She repeated under her breath again. “Jasmine, you are always welcomed to come stay with me.”

Diamond was already out of her mother house and she lived by herself.

“I know you’ll let me come but, I want to see if it works out first.”

“O.K. You still welcomed.”

“Thanks. Anyway’s Diamond, Joseph taking me out to eat and I’m going to tell him then. I have to go iron my clothes. O.K.”

“O.K.”

“Bye.”

“Bye.” Diamond said hanging up the phone.

When I hung up with Diamond, I went straight to the closet, picked out my clothes then began to iron them. When I was finished, I set my clothes out and went to jump in the shower. After my bath, Joseph still wasn’t home so I decided to take a short nap.

“Get up.”

“Joseph, why are you screaming?” I asked awakening from my nap.

“Get up.” He repeated, screaming again. “Yo behind was supposed to be ready by the time I got off from work. That was one hour ago now get up.” He said while pulling my hair.

“Stop Joseph.” I screamed while crying.

“Shut up.” He screamed and dragging me off my bed.

While dragging me off the bed, he punched me in my head and kept hitting me. While crying, I protected my belly, making sure.

Joseph pulled me up by my neck and kept hitting me. I had forgotten to turn off the iron after using it. Using this thought. Joseph took the hot iron and hit me with it. He kept beating me with the iron and then topped it off with punching me in my stomach. That was the end of that.

“You O.K.?”

“Yeah.” I said to Diamond. “What happened?”

“Joseph. He hit you in your stomach but your twins all right.”

“Twins?” I asked. “What happened to my voice?”

“Yes twins.” She answered. “You’re having twins and because of the iron, your voice is a little shaky.”

“Oh.”

There was silence.

“How has all this violence affected your life?”

“A lot. I’m pregnant now. I’m out of my mind. I’m doing bad, terrible.”

“And what do you think caused all of this (the whole abuse)?”

“A lot of things.”

“Like what?”

“Like... the death of my mama. That’s where all the pain came from. It was also from my Daddy drinking and me being grown. ”

“What are you going to do about it?”

“I’m leaving. No man is going to ever run or ruin my life again. Daddy and Joseph has proven to me that I can’t trust another person that’s part of the ‘male species’.”

“I’m glad you’ve learned your lesson.”

“Me too. No more. Ever again.”

After I got out of the hospital, Diamond helped me pack my stuff and I went to stay with her. Joseph got put in jail but only for one year because I didn’t press charges. He already was in trouble with the law.

5 Months Later

I am now, 18 years old with two beautiful 5 months baby girls, Jaliyah and Jalysah. Even though their father and I are not together, they still get to see him (he’s out of jail). Ever since I left Hell, my life has been wonderful. I have grown and learned the hard way about pain. I’m just so glad it happened now and not later.

Never Again. No More Abuse!

Glossary

Meanings From The story

Aight: O.K.
Aint: Isn't, not
Bald up: The face looking mad
Boy'z: Friends
Fed up: Tired of
Fronting: Playing games
Guts: Braveness
High: Smoking
Hoodlum: Thug, Bad person
Info: Information
Male Species: Male, Boys
O'Well: It doesn't matter
Pissed: Mad, Angry
Playing Hard To Get: Playing around. Playing games
Spooked: Scared
Tight: Hard, Mean
Wassup: Hi (a greeting)
Wild: Crazy, out of hand



John Kelley

South Miami Middle School
Grade 7

Miami

I have fought, won, lost
Seen people take things they never bought
This is what affected me.

Pride is broken,
Prejudice is rising,
Insanity running amok.
When these causes are rising,
You, sir, are out of luck,

I can be friends,
I can defend those weaker than me,
I can stop the violence that I see.

MISSISSIPPI

Special thanks to the following people who devoted their time and effort to making the *Do the Write Thing* Challenge a success:

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Francis Hill - Northeast Jones Middle School



Sioban Scott

Kemper County Middle School
Grade 8

Mississippi

THE CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF YOUTH VIOLENCE IN MY LIFE

I am walking down the hall in my school and I hear a derogatory remark about somebody or his mother. Another remark follows, then another. If I am lucky, a nearby teacher or staff member steps in before things get nasty, but sometimes nobody is there. Obscene words start flying back and forth. Then pushing, shoving, and punching starts. Next thing I know, I'm being slammed into the wall and pushed out of the way. Some crowd around to see, while others try to get out of the way. Two or three teachers come to separate the fighters. As they are pulled apart, I glimpse their angry, bloody faces.

Youth violence affects me everyday. Often, I am able to get away in time, so I don't find myself trapped in the middle of it. The violence is not always physical, but often it is obscene language or gestures and threats. I hear kids ridiculing others to make them feel like outcasts. Surprisingly, it is not just boys fighting anymore, girls fight each other and boys fight girls. When I hear or see these things, I feel horrible. It makes me wonder why people go that far. Why can't kids just walk away?

I am very fortunate. I have an excellent home life. My parents always keep me in line and are excellent role models. I think that part of the reason kids are so violent is that their parents are not giving them attention or being good role models. A child is a product of parental influences. Kids reflect their parents' actions and attitudes. I know many people who live in chaotic environments and I have seen the resulting violence in their actions and reactions.

Television, video games, and violent music also add to the problem. Music, games, and shows should not be completely eliminated, but they should be less violent. There is too much violence altogether. Such products influence kids to perform violent acts. Production companies can make shows and games exciting and fun, but not violent and graphic. I also think the Internet should be closely monitored so violent material isn't available to children. These things need to change so that they don't add to the problem of youth violence.

As I was asking myself about how I can fix the problem, I came to a conclusion. I can only begin to change other people by changing myself. By making myself a nonviolent and loving person, I can be a good influence on those kids who need a more positive person in their lives. I can also be an example and teach kids to be calm and cool and walk away from violent situations. If I can start a trend and get more kids to become nonviolent and loving people, maybe someday, there will be a little more peace in the world.



Shad White

Northeast Jones Middle School
Grade 8

Mississippi

Dear Reader,

Recently I, along with the United States and the world, have become distressed over the issue of youth violence. Youth violence is something that affects and threatens us all, from the streets of busy cities to the small town roads of rural America. In the past few years, youth violence has taken on new forms. Our schools ring with the sound of gunshots. Our churches and temples quake with bomb threats and the thought of massacres. The booming television industry fuels the furnace of youth violence in America. Many feel as though they are innocent bystanders waiting to become another martyr for the sake of domestic peace. But what can we do to stop our nation and world from falling into the abyss of youth violence?

Regardless of common skepticism, we can do many things to prevent youth violence. For starters, we can limit the violence that comes on our television sets. Television is one of the biggest influences in our lives. Research by Dr. George Gerbner (University of Pennsylvania) shows that the average television program contains twenty violent acts per hour. More research by Leonard Eron (University of Illinois) has shown children who watch more television show more aggression and are more likely to commit a criminal offense in their adult years. The obviously important act of changing our television may seem a job for politicians, but we the citizens must first petition to make our views clear for our representatives. If our government refuses to respond, we can simply avoid and encourage others to avoid the programs that show excessive violence. Demonstrating and petitioning are not enough, however. We must help others with their problems. Show your friends other ways to solve their squabbling. Listen to your friends and watch for any signs of suicide, hatred toward other students, or involvement in drugs.

The causes of youth violence in America have exceeded the boundaries of television and spilled over into violent games and sports. Doom, the game which helped provoke the Columbine High School shooting, and many other violent forms of video and computer entertainment should have an age limit placed on them. Ultimate Fighting and professional wrestling also plant the seed of violence in the youth of America. Today classes on solving disputes are not taught in our schools. Laws holding parents responsible for knowing the least bit about their child's activities (like whether or not they are building pipe bombs in their basement) are not in place. We must work to change this before it is too late!

If we do not change this, however, the ways youth violence affects us will increase. Already schools have taken out lockers and banned backpacks. Spontaneous checks of our private space are a constant at my school and many others around the United States. Fights have become common to the point of breaking out when the smallest problems are not solved. These situations will worsen more and more quickly if we do not work to bring peace back to our homes and schools.

So, in closing, I hope you have come to see some of my insights on youth violence and also have come to develop some of your own ideas. In the words of Elizabeth Kenny, "He who angers you conquers you." We all must apply this truth to our lives to solve our problems. A new horizon is up ahead, but it will not come to us. We must band together to become one voice to coax our new future in!

Sincerely,
A Concerned Student

NEWARK

Special thanks to the following people who devoted their time and effort to making the *Do the Write Thing* Challenge a success:

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Teachers of National Finalists

Sheila Pugh - Hawkins Street School
Stacy Watson - Sussex Avenue School



Darren Alvarez

Hawkins Street School
Grade 7

Newark

The Killer of Kayla: The Boy with No Name

I'm here to tell all my reader's a story I don't really know how this story started but I do happen to know how this story ended up. All I wanted was for someone to love and to care for me, but no one wanted to be there for me. I reached out and tried to get love and attention but I was rejected. By Kayla and everyone else. I lived in a crackhouse with a mother, a sister, my father, and a couple of other people. My father was caught trying to sell drugs and my mother is gone because she was caught doing drugs. I was all alone. There was no one there to care for me and I doubted the world ever be. I led my whole life of being bad, disrespectful, and unbearable. I was complete out of control. I once stabbed another student with a pencil. I also fought over a small thing like food or a pickelto be more specific. One day I tried to kiss Kayla but she rejected me. Another day I saw a gun under some bedsheets on top of a bed. That's when I decided to pick the gun up and put it someplace where no one could have seen it on me. I also took a pocket knife to school. When I arrived at school

one boy found the pocket knife I had and reported it to the teacher. My teacher took it away as soon as she was told I had it. I held the gun closely trying to at least keep that weapon a secret. While we were going up the stairs I decided I was going to use the gun at that exact time. I pulled the gun out and pointed it straight at one of my classmates. I shoved a girl named Kayla and "I don't like you." She answered "So" to challenge me. She didn't know that I had a gun and looked at me. I pointed the gun straight at her. Without a second of hesitation I shot her. I watched her as she held her stomach and her neck. I watched her as she died slowly all because of me. I ran to the bathroom and threw the gun in the garbage then hid. I killed her without a care in my mind. Anything that happened to her didn't matter to me. I wrote these questions and answers to help prevent more lives from being lost.

How has youth violence and drug abuse affected my life?

Youth violence and drug abuse affected my life greatly. What I saw everyday made me believe it was what my life would be until the day I a

I lived in a crackhouse. in with I saw drugs.
This is what what made me shoot a little girl
named Kayla. This is the horror I see everyday.

What are the causes of youth violence and drug
abuse?

There are many causes for youth violence
and drug abuse. One is like the ~~same~~ I live
through. Having no one to care for me. Living
in drugs and guns with no one to look out for
me. So much depression is what caused me to
kill Kayla. It is also the exact same thing
that will kill many other people.

What can I do about youth violence and drug abu.

I can do many things about youth violen.
and drug abuse. I've just killed a 6 year old girl.
She didn't do anything wrong, but I killed her
anyway. I am only 6 years old. I've done alot
of bad things but I never killed anyone. I'm
living proof that depression can hurt people great.
I can rehabilitate myself and show people that we
can get better. That is how I will help and do
something about youth violence and drug abuse.

If you want to know what I did after
I took Kayle's life, I'll tell you, I colored
in a coloring book. If you want to know what
I'm doing right now, I'll tell you, this also. I'm
regretting I ever brought the gun to school. What
I did was unforgivable, and also unforgettable. I
hope that people don't take the wrong turn I took
I hope that they can learn from my mistake.



Iesha Williams

Sussex Avenue School
Grade 8

Newark

Hi, my name is Jesha Williams. I am in the 8th grade. I like the idea of you letting the 7th-8th grades have the opportunity of writing about how they feel about their life. I think violence is a bad thing because you can die, also harm people badly then what you expect. Violence, I think that it's a very bad word, it has a lot of meaning to it. It causes a lot of trouble, pain, and mainly tears. It's many things that my community and I can do to stop the violence. The only reason I think that we haven't stop the crime is because we are doing the best we can to let the police do what they need to do. For my opinion they doing great, they are going great because most of the dealers and users are not in the street. I'm happy so much because they are not making a good influence on our children like myself. So, let me write to you and tell how I feel about, How has youth violence affected my life? What are the causes of youth violence? What can I do about youth violence?

I think youth violence affected my life because it's very scary in this world today. It's many people in my community that sell and do drugs. I think it's bad for us as the children because they sell it right in front of our faces. They have houses and some buildings that have a lot of different types of drugs in them. It affects me bad because I feel like I'm not safe for anything. For example, When I was living on 4th street. It was a building a cross the street and behind my building they solded it all day and night. I had people in my building that had the dealers in they homes. I know that was they chose but it was a lot of children in the building that played with the other kids. The dealers had weapons like gun and knife's

when they argue with people that probably didn't have they drug money. It's many of my friends that know dealers but when I'm around my friends the dealer act very respectful. But, I don't get to closet to them because you never know what they can do to you. If I hang out with people that do that stuff and they ask me to do it with them I would say "No" right away because if my family find out about it, I would not be trusted again if I did it. It's bad for my sister and I because my biological father (that don't live with us) do drugs and for me expectal I love looking up to my all adults, mainly my mother and father. I'm happy that when he do get high or drunk he doesn't put on people, he might do crazy things but, he doesn't harm no body.

Another example, is when the 6 year-old boy killed his classmates, Raysha (that was also 6 year old)? I'm afraid because before he killed the little old Raysha he said, "I hate you". Also make me afraid because I don't know if it would happen in another school were my other family member, and my other friends. They should for now on check for reasons in all school over the world. For one more example, when the to boys kill the other students and teacher also themselves at Columbine. So, that's how I feel about, Steve has youth affected my life.

I think the cause of youth violence, is if you hang out with the wrong people. They would probably make you do the wrong thing, right with them. It they pressure you into doing some thing, I know you are going to gave up and do what they tell you. It may feel like you are doing the right thing (a) at the time to make them feel better. But, when you are finished, you would wish you could turn back the hands of time. For example,

let's say I'm in the 5th grade and I love hanging out with the outer crowd but don't like getting in to trouble. So, one day out of the week we have computer. We don't like the computer class for anything. My so-called friends say let's go to the gym to have so real fun. They running down the hall "Jesha" yelling are you coming. I walks down there and say no I'm not coming I don't want to get in trouble. Then, they start calling me you chicken. I keep replying to them, I am not a chicken So, they keep calling baby chicken, mammy little girl. I get so mad and they pressured me so mush I decide to do it. I said to them I 'm going prove you all wrong. As, soon as we start to play, some one on the intercom called for us. We wait for a few minutes to go to the offica. When we get to the offices they asked us, "why all of you out of computer class". They all turn to me and said she maked us do it and she pressures us to do it Jesha was calling us chicken- chicken. They believed them probably because it was 4 against my 1 (me). Mostly probably because I was the biggest out the group. When they called my house my mother ask to speak to me and she said you are going to get it when you get home. You know when your parents say you going to get it you usually do. For now I know, to hang out with the inner crowd and not the otter crowd. Since that year I never hang out with bad people. If I do I stay away from them when they going to do something bad.

About youth violence really, I don't know what I can really do because I'm just a child. I am not saying that I don't feel like doing something about it. I want to do something in my life to help stop the violence in my community or the world. Mainly I think I can do is just

Boy: Sesha Williams
 March 16, 2000
 Sussex Avenue
 8th grade 4a
 Whiting

write about it and pray to what I write. It's many things that violence can do to me but I'm just trying to make it not happen to me, my love one even my enemies. I can start having group meetings to talk about how to stop the violence. We also can have fun raises to have the bad influence to come to help us. "Stand" by the time we get finish with the first bad influence and change them. We would like if the old bad influences do the same to the other new bad influences.

In conclusion, I hope what I wrote help you understand my feelings towards the bad influence in my life. It's many things that I wish that don't happen but, I understand that it's just life, bad things would happen all my life, if I like it or don't. I have many feelings towards a lot of things. Some times when I write about it then read it people take it the wrong way. When I write, I write how I feel and what's on my mind. So I hope I answered the three questions about violence. I hope I gave you many examples in my letter. So, that concludes my feelings about the three questions.

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Eleanor McMain Magnet School
Grade 7

New Orleans

CRIME, HATRED, LOVE: THE CONNECTION: VIOLENCE

When I was young I saw violence all the time,
Morning, noon and supertime.
A young man getting his brain blown out at the corner store,
Mad men knocking upon my neighbors door.
“Open up,” they would say.
If they only knew that wasn't where Junior stays.
For then they busted down the door when nobody answered
And killed my friend who was bound to be a marvelous, marvelous dancer.
My life has been so full of violence and danger
You sometimes have to watch friends closer than you watch strangers.
Only God knows all of the tears that I cry
And only He knows all the nights I prayed my family and friends would not die,
From a gunshot I heard through the wall.
I wonder how some families keep standing tall.
I tell you these days brothers and sisters just don't care
They beat you and take everything – your dog, your car or your fake hair.
No more echoes of mercy, or whispers of love.
Murder is all most folks think of.
Excited because of the death of another
When you should really be praying for his/her mother.
Mothers and fathers grieving over dead sons,
Sad because their life had just begun.
And yet a person was so quick to take that precious life away
Not to ever again see the light of another day.
People sometimes shoot another
Cause that person shot their cousin's baby's grandmothers's brother.

I guess they think this is some kind of play.
Come on we as a people need to do better than that.
And that my friend is a very serious fact.
Girls sometimes fight over little boys.
Babies fighting over old broken toys.
Boys at school talking about guns,
Little Johnny getting mad cause he ain't got none
Thinking they are fun.
Women getting beat by their men
They leave them but say love brings them back again.
Also because he says he will change
Try to make up for things,
Always says he's sorry.
Man, your excuses are getting very boring.
Saying his six kids need him
What about that nice guy Jim.
Hatred is a cause that we are where we are today,
Envy and drugs also have paved the way.
Jealousy is something we could live without
For there are other things this world is about.
Mothers gazing out of the window wondering when her son will come home
She begs him on her knees, but still he won't come.
See he is caught up in the game on the street
Can't sleep because he is haunted by the faces of the people he has beat,
One day he'll see his terrible life flash before his eye
That will be the day his mother will surely die
Thinking of her long gone son
Where in his life had she gone wrong and led him to pick up a gun.

But will she ever learn to just be strong.
For it wasn't her, but him who went wrong.
Love sometimes starts violence too,
When you find out a love can't be faithful to you
You shoot his/her lover with a smile on your face.
Your heart jumping with excitement, beating at a rapid pace
You were so caught up in the love, you just couldn't go on
And had to get back at the love who had done you wrong.
We can all change the way things are,
If we follow this -
We should learn what we can learn while we can learn it.
We should earn all we can earn while we can earn it.
Believe in yourself,
Even if that means being against everyone else.
We need to love each other unconditionally
And this world should get along perfectly.
If we pray for one another
I think we'll better communicate with each other.
See I believe that if everyone gave each other a helping hand
This world would be a better place for growing a man.
You see crime is just something people fall on,
When they have no shoulder to lean on.
I am really just writing to say,
Here's a shoulder you can lean this way!



Avery Thomas

Livingston Middle School
Grade 8

New Orleans

My essay is about how youth violence and drug use have effected my life, what I feel is the cause of this problem and what I can do about the problem.

In order to do this essay I did a little research on the internet about teen drug use and violence. In America teenage drug use is at a all time high. A survey by PRIDE estimate that 1 in 4 high school seniors use drugs once a month, 1 in 5 use drugs weekly, 1 in 10 use drug daily. Drug use is responsible for a high number of school dropouts, teens having babies, crime, suicide and death by drug overdose. Young people use drugs for many reasons that have to do with how they feel about themselves, how they get along with others and how they live.

In my research I found that murder between African-American and Hispanic youths was the second leading cause of death in the United States. For every violent death, there are at least an estimated 100 nonfatal injuries caused by violence. Youths are responsible for crimes from theft to murder.

I'm a 13 year old boy living in New Orleans, Louisiana. My family is not rich nor do I receive everything I want. In my family we work together I help out with my younger brother for my mom to work. I live in a single parent household. My mom taught me to respect and love others and myself. My mom is not a drug user nor are my uncles and aunts. Drugs are something that's not in my home. I do not hang out with children who use drugs to my knowledge.

In my opinion I feel that drug abuse causes many of the crimes committed by youths in the United States. Many rob, steal and kill for money to support their drug habit. Many teenage boys commit crimes to support the habits of their parents. I've been lucky so far in that I'm not on drugs and I have never committed a crime. I live in a part of the city that's not so great. I see ~~drug deals~~, police ~~arrests~~ and more. I realize that's not the road I want to take. I have dreams and goals. In order to become what I want to be, there is no place for drugs or violence. I also do not want to spend the rest of my life caged up like an animal. I don't know what jail is like, but I've seen it on television I don't think I'd like it.

To prevent me from taking the wrong street to violence and drug use. I don't hangout with people who do these things. My mom always says "you

are who you hang out with". So drug and violence is not for me so I don't hang with people who do those things.

I try to tell my friend to say no to drugs. I always talk to my mom about things I feel may cause me to make the wrong choices. There is not much at my age I can to prevent youths from using drugs or committing violent acts. All I can do is to make sure that I don't get involved with these types of acts and the friends that I have don't do it either.

NEW YORK

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MS 180

Grade 8

New York

Nowhere to Hide

**Mom put my coat on,
It was a cool sunny day.
We were headed to the park,
To run and to play,
But when we arrived,
We didn't stay long,
My mother just knew,
That something was wrong.
A large group of kids were standing around,
Staring at someone face down on the ground.
All I could see was a big pool of red,
We overheard someone say, that poor boy is dead.
Mom put me in my stroller and we went home quick,
She ran to the bathroom and got very sick.
We didn't go out again for quite awhile,
I almost forgot what it felt like to smile.
Not long after, the movers came,
We left our nice apartment, it was a shame.
Life in the city wasn't meant to be,
What the future holds, I'll wait and see.
I'm much older now and love my new school,
My friends, and my new home are really cool.
My parents really love it too,
They don't worry anymore about everything that I do.
But long lived happiness wasn't meant to be,
Our quaint little town suffered a tragedy.
For on this day like any other,
I ate my breakfast, said goodbye to my mother.
I headed to school with a group of my friends,
Never knowing for some it would be the end.
The end of their life, the end of their breath,
A slow painful terrible death!
How could so few of our own,
Get the knives, build the bombs, get those guns all alone?
HOW COULD NO ONE HAVE KNOWN?!?**

**As I lay on the floor down the hall from the noise,
I prayed to the Lord I wouldn't be found by those boys.
I longed for my mother, I longed for my dad,
If I died in this school, they would be so sad!
When the shooting was over, the police stormed the place,
I saw grief, despair, and confusion on everyone's face.
As I rose from the safety of the floor,
I ran with my hands up, toward the door.
All I could see from one end to the other,
Was the lifeless, crumpled bodies of my sisters and brothers.
NOOOOOO!!!!**

**"Wake up Danny, Wake up Danny, Mom is here,"
She sat me up in bed and held me near.**

"It's okay now, it's all been a dream."

"It all seemed too real!" I said with a scream.

**As I lay back down in my bed,
Visions of my dream filled my head.**

**For one day this could really be,
My unfortunate reality.**

**Just read the paper or watch TV,
This could happen to you or to me!**

**This world is such a scary place,
For every child in the human race.**

**I wish that my world and yours could be,
A place to feel safe and free,
In total peace and harmony!**

**But wishes don't make dreams come true,
It must begin with me and you.**

So spread the word,

And hear what I said,

For our loved ones don't want to see us dead!



Juanita Ramos

KIPP Academy
Grade 8

New York

Juanita Ramos
Do The "Write" Thing

February 13, 2000
KIPP Academy

Life in the Ghetto-
Is Not Easy

Life in the ghetto-
Is not easy
I walk down the block
With worries of getting shot
I cannot walk without fear,
Only because I know danger is near
Won't wear red
Visions scare me of being dead
Won't wear blue
Another color that brings harm too
Won't wear yellow
People will think I'm a Latin Queen
Every thugs dream
Guaranteed to hear a scream
But it will be mine
I'll get shot on my block
Because cops might think
I'm apart
Of an illegal plot

As you can see, life isn't easy living in the ghetto. Just like it is first nature to look both ways before you cross the street, it is first nature to look both ways when you walk out your building. I live in fear. I have to watch everything that I do. I can't wear colors like red, blue, or yellow without worrying about getting hurt. Different gangs dominate different colors and it will cost me my life if I wear it.

I live in the poorest region in the United States Of America- The South Bronx. It is a very challenging place to live- especially when you are young, female, and attractive. I experience a lot of pressure. A lot of negative cycles are created here. Not many people have high expectations for themselves. I don't think people realize that what happens around us is wrong. We have adapted to negativity so much that when bad things happen, we don't experience pain because this is the way of life for us.

The South Bronx is a place where violence is promoted. Ignorance thrives in the South Bronx. Say something like "Knowledge is power" or "Team beats individual" and people will look at you like you are crazy. Say something like "Don't fight and talk it out" and people will think something is wrong with you. When I walk down the block, I make sure I don't walk near strangers. I might accidentally step on someone's shoes and they'll shoot me.

If I don't live in your project, I'm not walking through it. Around here, people claim territory like someone died and left them in charge. Imagine that you walk through a project and everyone sees that you are a new face. Everyone knows that you do not live there and the next thing that you know, people surround you and take you to a rooftop and push you off. This sounds crazy but these things really happen.

Where I live, teens kill teens all of the time. If somebody looks at your girlfriend, you shoot him. If somebody steps on your shoe, you shoot him. If someone looks at you "wrong", you shoot him. If somebody walks through your project, you push him off a rooftop. In the South Bronx, a lot of people are miseducated. Quite frankly, a lot of people don't seem to notice it and if they do notice, they don't care. There aren't that many role models so teens don't have enough people to look up to.

**The South Bronx is a game
Called survival of the fittest
Just when you are about to win
Repercussions spin
I look around my neighborhood
And know this isn't where I want to be
God has a map laid out for me
The world is scary
And sometimes I feel alone
Maybe things would be better if I were grown
Life is a challenge that I must overcome
Life is a challenge that is never done
Though at times it may not be fun
Life is a challenge that must be won**

There aren't that many solutions for teen violence. You can educate teens as much as you want to but when push comes to shove, it's a teen's decision whether or not they want to condone negativity or promote positivity. We know the difference between right and wrong. A lot of teens just choose to make bad choices.

I am not one of those teens. I can see myself having a positive future. I am going to go to a top boarding school and college and be somebody. I'm determined not to become a statistic. I care about myself. I could care less about whether or not someone steps on my sneaker. All I need in my life is my education. It is my only key out of the ghetto.

I am going to grow up and become a success. All of my little brothers and sisters, hopefully, will follow in my footsteps. I want to create a positive cycle. I am young and I do not want to see an early grave. I want to live each day of my life to its fullest extent.

There isn't much that I can do about teen violence. All I can do is not promote it. I do not condone violence and I teach my younger sibling and cousins not to. I lead by example and hope that everyone will follow. Education is key and knowledge is power. Our education is the building block to the future. Without it, we are nothing.

**Life in the ghetto
Is not easy
Life in the ghetto
Will not please me
I am a gem
And I have no price
I'm going to study hard
And continue to be nice
I'm going to make my life right**

**Keep all my dreams in sight
Have a positive life
And everything will be all right
I'm going to accomplish my dreams
And go real far
And one day I will become
That ghetto superstar**

PHILADELPHIA

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Amy-NW School
Grade 8

Philadelphia

Do the Write Thing Challenge 2000

In the past few years, youth violence has touched everyone, parents, teachers, and students alike. It has affected some people indirectly while they are drinking their morning coffee and reading a newspaper article about the latest school shooting. Or, it has affected some people directly like a mother crying at night for her dead child. I can hardly believe someone with a soul could even contemplate killing a person, let alone the someone being my age. I see and hear these kinds of things way too often for a kid.

I notice the ramifications of youth violence everyday. There are rumors of school officials considering metal detectors and locker searches in schools. I pass by guards already patrolling the neighborhood schools on my way to the bus stop. Everyone looks so tense and worried as if they expect something to happen to them the minute they walk down the hallway. Sometimes it's so frustrating I just want to scream, "All of this doesn't reflect me, and I would never do something like that." I feel like schools are really battlefields with youth violence. Everyone has a right to feel paranoid. Recent events are evidence enough.

Only a few weeks ago, a fight broke out at school. Instantaneously, a crowd of spectators surrounded them, cheering them along. Here were my classmates actually glorifying fighting. No wonder people label and stereotype us as being violent and rebellious.

Peer pressure is just one of many reasons kids resort to violence. Kids worry a lot about what their friends think and they don't want themselves to be written off as scared or cowardly.

A lot of kids I know have short tempers and one look or word can set them. They either want to start fights or don't know how to control their anger well. Other kids feel ignored or depressed and that no one bothers to listen to them. They are ridiculed by peers because of who they are. The truth is that some kids are cruel, ignorant and don't accept people who are different. Everyone has gone through this and I know how easy it is to just lose your logic and reason, and lash out.

Even though I try to demonstrate pacifism, I have almost gotten into fights. Sometimes, I have rage and frustration bottled up inside of me. Now, I have a group of friends who listen to me and can offer advice and sympathy. Communication is the best cure. It can help people work out their problems without blood and fists. I try to do that for others, be someone willing to listen. People who need someone to understand them should talk to their friends or professionals like a therapist or a support group. I think I can prevent youth violence by not being a spectator in a fight. I don't need to act like everyone else by supporting fighting to be accepted as cool. If I ever find myself in a situation, being forced to fight, I'll walk away and encourage others to do the same.

Teaching kids early is also extremely important. You can't let them grow up thinking violence is cool. Right now, so many younger children have access to the wrong kind of influences from older siblings, friends and other people they come into contact with. I make it a rule to hang out with my little sister and talk about her day. I emphasize that there are better ways to solve conflicts with her friends or enemies than fighting. I don't want youth violence hurting her or anyone else in my family. Educating kids on

doing the right thing now is a lot easier than doing it later when they are so used to having violence in their lives.

Youth violence has become so integrated in our society, kids don't even bat an eye when they see a fight. They come to expect it or worse, want to be a part of it. However, not all kids are violent. A lot of them do care about what happens to their schools and neighborhoods. Nobody really wants their families, friends, and themselves consumed by youth violence. People just have to understand that violence is not the answer. With that truth, there will always be a glimmer of hope for this generation and the next.



Sean Medcalf

J.S. Jenks Middle School
Grade 7

Philadelphia

Violence in America's Youth

The United States of America is the richest country on Earth. We have more resources at our disposal than any other nation in the world. Our system of government, though it has its problems, is what many consider to be the best system of government on the aforementioned planet, whose name doesn't have enough synonyms to effectively drone on about. What I'm really getting at is that if we *are* in such a position of power, why can't we stop the violence in our youth?

We see it on the news everyday: tragedies such as the one at Columbine High School, or in Greensboro, Arkansas. There was even one incident where a six-year-old boy shot a fellow *first grader!* Obviously, America has got a serious problem with youth violence.

Youth violence has not affected me very much, though I have been witness to several instances in which a person has been harmed physically by a fellow student. I have also watched the school board gradually tighten regulations to the point where pencils can be construed as weapons, in the correct (or should I say, incorrect) circumstances.

The cause of this violence lies in several places, I believe. First off, name-calling and teasing doesn't help. How would you feel if someone constantly made fun of you? Sometimes a person's sanity can become fragile. All of that teasing will often drive someone over the edge so that they become bent on revenge.

Sometimes, it is a spur-of-the-moment thing. Haven't you ever felt like blasting someone to smithereens on the spot? For example, you are at the movies, and the theater is empty. The flic is just about to start, when all of a sudden Marge Simpson sits down directly in front of you, completely ignoring the other one-hundred odd seats in the theater. Then her friend appears, and they start gabbing about Ricky Martin or some such thing. Meanwhile,

you can't see or hear a thing. You must have had an experience like that. Sometimes it escalates. You might say something to the lady, and she might react badly to it. This starts an argument. Then the lady pulls a gun on you. Often after it's done, the criminal is repentant, but it is too late. We are all human, and we all have emotions, one of which is anger. These criminals aren't madmen all of the time. They just got pushed too far.

This leads to another problem. Weapons, especially guns, are *far* too easy to come upon in this country. Kids in England or Japan aren't any less violent than they are here. All it is is that guns are much harder to obtain in these countries. If a child gets angry in one of these countries, he might jump the other kid. I'm not saying that that is a good thing, but to err is human, and, while bruises heal, death is forever.

Another cause of violence, in my opinion, is the home environment. If a parent beats or neglects their child, the youth will grow up deprived and not really care about themselves or where they end up. The parent might also be a drug dealer or some such evil. As in the case of the six-year-old who shot his own classmate, the child may often be exposed to violence, sometimes killing, and in general the whole criminal underworld, and grow up with a twisted sense of reality.

Or, the child may be raised in exactly the opposite manner. He or she may be a child of privilege. The child would grow up, being waited on hand and foot, privy to anything they want. This leads the child to believe that they can do anything they want, including kill someone.

The big question is, how do we *stop* violence? To be honest, it would be virtually impossible to completely stop violence. Humans are what we are, and so are our emotions. We can't help it if we get ticked at something, and sometimes we just go off. However, there are many ways to minimize violence. I, for one, think that banning guns would be a *huge*, and I can't stress the word *huge* enough, step in stopping violence. Without guns, there would be a much lower possibility of the argument ending up with

any serious injuries, since it would be harder to obtain a lethal weapon, barring knives. I also think we should hunt down any criminals, or *anybody* who mistreats their child or children. As for the teasing, that will go on until the end of time; how we can help is by making it clear to those being teased that the teaser is most probably jealous. The one being teased has got to realize that if the one teasing must be so childish as to make fun of someone, so be it. The one being teased must realize that he or she doesn't have to stoop to the level of the teaser, and that he or she is better than the teaser.

In closing, I would like to say that, hard as we try, we will never be able to take charge of our emotions. We may keep a straight face, but deep down, our true feelings always show through. We cannot control our feelings about things, but we can, to an extent, control how we express those emotions. I leave you now in high spirits, and with high hopes for a brighter future.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Special thanks to the following people who devoted their time and effort to making the *Do the Write Thing* Challenge a success:

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WASHINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

School System Coordinator

Michon Peck

Teachers of National Finalists

Geraine Armstrong - Jefferson Junior High School
Angela Rice - Jefferson Junior High School



Angela Brown

Jefferson Junior High School
Grade 8

Washington, D.C.

TIM!

Tim was walking down the street
With a E.B. jacket on
And "timbs" on his feet
He never really thought about losing his life
To some thug-life boy
Wanting to cause others strife
He woke up everyday
Living life the same way
Never wondering about falling into
Some bullet that may go astray
Tim was outstanding and smart
And Jr. High School, he was about to start.

He saw on the news almost everyday
People losing their lives
By words they might say.
Tim saw some incidents, face to face,
He saw the destruction the devil put on our race.

As Tim walked down the street,
All this drama was racing through his mind
And a reason he could not find
For all this black-on-black crime.
As Tim walked,
He came across two boys fussing;

He kept on walking on that dark gloomy night
and that fussing escalated into a fight.
They kept on fighting,
Till one reached into his pants
Tim looked back once and fell into a trance.
The man pulled out a gun,
And the other's only instinct was to run.
The man ran in Tim's direction,
Tim ducked down real low
Hoping not to be seen
But the bullet hit his back, he fell down slow
Without a scream.

Like I said, he kept living his life
Day by day the same way
Never thinking he'd be caught
In the cross fire of a bullet gone astray.
Well, what could he say?
He didn't know that was his last day on earth
I mean it was a couple of years from the day
of his birth.
Even though it was the day he would die,
He didn't even cry.
Tim knew he was going to heaven,
But the sad part about it, he was only eleven.

I feel youth violence is growing day by day
Innocent people are losing their lives
In each and every way.
To stay away from youth violence
I must do my part
I must stay in school
And grow to be real smart.
I must listen closely to valuable lessons
I am taught
And think about all battles my ancestors
 have fought.

When I think of youth violence,
I want to sit and take a moment of silence
For all the young people who have died
Who have lost their lives, dreams and self pride.
Youth violence affects me,
Because it helps me to see
How lucky I have been so far
At any time I could have lost my life,
At home, school, or even in a car.
I'm glad God has got my back
I believe in Him and trust Him, that's a fact.

I feel youth violence sometimes begins
By peer-pressure from people's friends

In my story, youth violence came to play,
By Tim walking down the street on a dark
gloomy day.

He was minding his business, doing nothing at all
First, standing tall; then in an instance took
a fall.

Youth violence starts from many things
Point blank people see the drama it brings.

Youth violence is like a two way road
You can do what you have to and go the
right way
Or mess up and go wrong.



Elijah Huggins

Jefferson Junior High School
Grade 7

Washington, D.C.

Do the Right Thing

When I listen to older people talk about how things were "back in the day," I hear of a time when people felt safe, children felt secure and loved, and no one was filled with fear on a daily basis. I hear of a time when everyone looked out for everyone else's children, when children respected their elders and respected each other, and when everyone understood and appreciated the value of a good education. When I listen to older people retell stories of their youth, I would expect the period during which I am now growing up to be a happy, carefree time when the only thing that I and other youth have to worry about is waking up to go to school, completing homework assignments, preparing for the science fair and other projects, studying, and most of all, getting a good education that prepares us for the future. Years from now when we look back at our youthful years, we should be able to remember them as the happiest and best times of our lives.

For me, the years I have lived so far have indeed been very happy and free of concern, but that's because of the environment of which I am a part. I have been blessed to be part of a beautiful, loving family that worships together and plays together. I am surrounded by wonderful friends. I live in a relatively safe neighborhood, and I attend a public school in Washington, D.C. that is truly a peaceable school. While I have

been fortunate to experience a good life and one that is rich, not with material things but rich with love, I am not blind to the negative and disturbing situations and events that have warped the society in which we live. Perhaps nothing is more troubling or affects me more right now than youth violence.

Youth violence has affected my life by opening my eyes and letting me see how much the world has changed. We hear of a violent crime involving or affecting youth nearly everyday. We all need to open our eyes and see what our youth are doing to each other. We must not only see it but help stop it. We all need to make a commitment to stop the violence. We all need to make a commitment to peace.

So many young people fear going to school each day because of all the violence that has occurred and the violence that they know will meet them there. It should not be that way. Every child is entitled to attend school free of any concern about safety. Every child should be able to approach school with an eagerness to enter. Every child has a right to reach the age one day when they can look back upon their youth and remember it as the best years of their lives.

Many people believe that youth violence is caused by one particular group, such as gangs. To me the causes of youth violence are numerous: violent words or conflicts between spouses, parent and child, and child vs. child; lack of self-esteem; self-hatred; hatred of one's environment; inability to handle feelings of anger and frustration in a positive, non-violent way; a lack of understanding and appreciation of differences among people and cultures; peer pressure; the prevalence of violent weapons; drug abuse; and more.

We live in a society that does not invest wisely in its youth. More time seems to be spent cutting the school budget than finding ways to increase the budget for education. More value seems to be placed on material things than on what matters most - love, peace, and understanding. People seem to place more value on an expensive piece of clothing, a popular pair of shoes, where one lives, and personal enjoyment of movies, television shows, and radio broadcasts that promote violence, than on the value of a child's education and life. The youth violence that is killing us and our future cannot stop until everyone stops to realize all that contributes to the violence that plagues our society.

Once we come to realize the many reasons for youth violence, we can begin to work on the many solutions to the problem. In order to stop the youth violence, different plans and strategies must be used. Many approaches have already been taken by youth, schools, and communities that are taking control and accepting the fact that the solution lies within each one of us. Everyone must take an active part. We must all do whatever we can to develop a drug-free, crime-free, and violent-free environment in our homes, our schools, and our communities. We have to each take a personal vow to stop supporting violence and the things that foster violence in our world.

To end youth violence, we have to stop accepting violence as a normal part of our lives. We have to stop listening to and watching violence, especially on the radio and on television. Parents have to stop buying the expensive shoes and clothes that children fight over and die for. They must choose peaceful forms of entertainment and reject violent video games and violent toys for their children. Adults have to stop resolving conflicts in a violent way and set good examples for the children who watch them. Children have to be taught to love themselves and to love others, even if they are different.

School instruction should include teaching students the

celebrate and appreciate the history and uniqueness of the many diverse cultures and countries that make our world so special. Schools should have stop the violence programs that educate and involve everyone, including students, teachers, and the community on a regular basis. Classes on handling feelings, avoiding confrontations, and responding in a non-violent manner should be part of the curriculum for every grade level in every school throughout the nation. Conflict resolution and peer mediation programs should be implemented in all schools, even in those where there is no concern about violence.

We must do these things and more to stop the dying. We must be thankful for what we have, not kill for what we don't have.

To stop the violence, we must have the courage to do what is right at all times and not be influenced by those who may do wrong. This means that I must not give in to peer influence when it comes to the use of guns, drugs, or even foul language. I must value life. I must remind others that even when we are wronged, it is not a reason to go after the wrongdoer and seek revenge.

As we journey into the new millennium, we cannot repeat the mistakes of the past. We must hear and follow Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s words of nonviolence and peace. We need people on earth to find cures, to keep people alive, to find a way to

shelter and feed the homeless, to help people live happy, meaningful lives. We need to keep Dr. King's dream alive. To do that, everyone should treat others equally and everyone should be valued. No one individual is better than another. We are all human beings. I must personally remember that each individual and group of people is special in their own way. I must always observe that every human being has dignity and worth, no matter how different they may be.

To help stop youth violence, I must do my part to avoid violent situations and violent behavior. I must always carry myself in an honorable and dignified manner. I must be honest and sincere at all times and in all that I do. I must have high standards for myself and accept nothing less than the best from myself. I must learn all that I can and continue to strive for academic excellence. I can help stop youth violence by speaking out in public and by organizing stop the violence activities, such as walkathons. I will continue to think of other ways that I can help, and I will participate in activities that promote peace.

To help stop the violence, I have taken my own personal pledge of nonviolence - to respect myself and others, to follow rules, to listen closely to what others have to say, to resolve problems peacefully, and to carry a peaceful attitude at all

times. Each day I carry God and love for everyone in my heart and spirit. I have faith that things will get better as we all look to ourselves for solutions. I have faith that the little that I do, whatever it may be, as long as it is positive and peaceful, can and will make a difference for all mankind.

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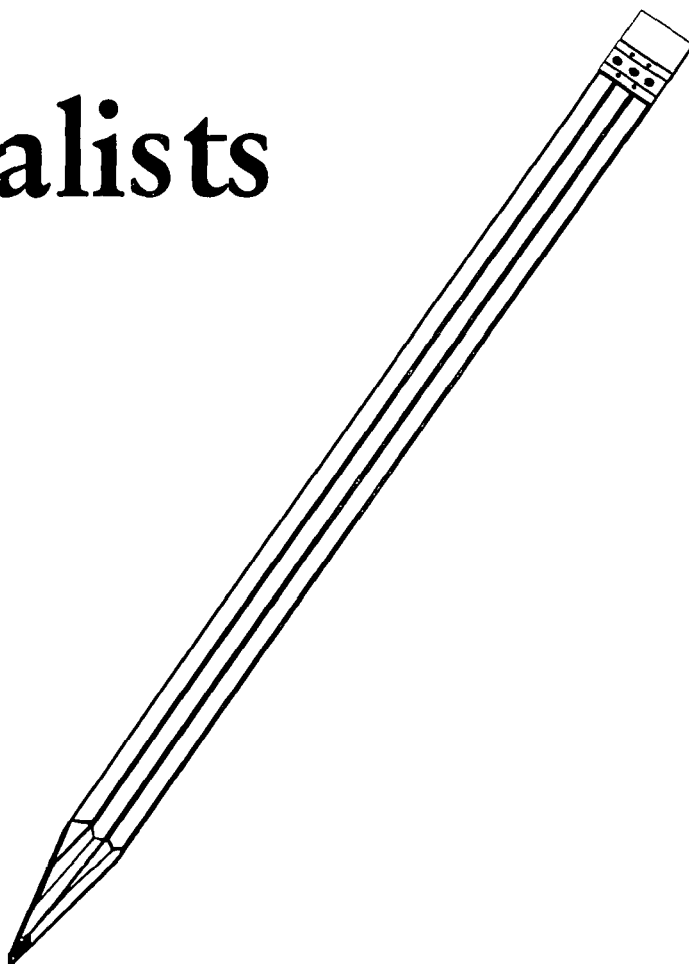
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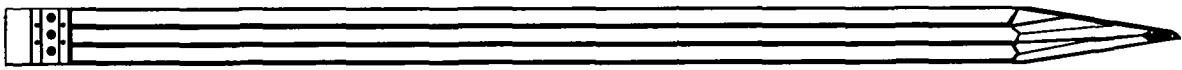
National Guard
Challe*N*Ge Program

Finalists



Brian Nickerson

Alaska ChalleNGe



Preventing Teen Violence in Our Communities

Teen violence is a problem that affects everyone including the person committing the crime. An example of teen violence includes situations when a gang tries to take over a neighborhood. They terrorize people and rob houses and stores in the community. Then the police get involved and the teen violence increases. The teens feel threatened and they fight to get back at the police and the community.

The reason this essay is important to me is because I have lost three friends and two cousins to teen violence. My friend was on the phone talking to his girlfriend when there was a drive by shooting next door. A stray bullet went through the window and hit him in the side, right below the ribs. He died 6 hours later and they never caught the shooters. My cousin was involved in an armed robbery investigation at the place where he used to work. Two of my friends were involved with drugs and gangs and they got high and killed two people. One was shot by the police and died; the other is in prison for life. I wish that there were some way to turn back the hands of time and change it so that they did not commit these crimes.

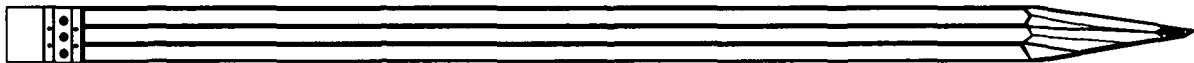
More than half of the people that commit these acts of teen violence are high school drop-outs or were kicked out of school with less than an 11th grade education. I think that if the teachers at the public schools were more involved in the students than their paychecks, and if the teens could have somewhere to go that was not expensive, some of these students would not turn to crime. I think that the communities could build a place where kids could go and spend time without having to pay money. A place where there was a bunch of people that cared about kids succeeding in life, instead of turning their backs on them. I think that everyone is more worried about the almighty dollar than the today's youth. The one thing that I truly think is not the answer is the legislation of new laws.

If kids are already lashing out against the laws that we have now, how are new laws going to change anything? What the police and the communities need to do is enforce the present laws, and not worry about creating new laws to cover up the failure of the last law created. The reason those laws failed is because they lacked the time and effort to enforce them. Another way to solve teen violence is to build the communication bridge. As soon as you do this, most of the problems will go away because you will see through the eyes of the youth and the youth will see what you are trying to do.

A way that I can help is by sharing my stories with teens and adults. I might be able to change one kid's mind about violence if I can help them understand the consequences of their actions. I can volunteer in my community to work with younger students and help them stay off drugs and out of gangs. We all need to be more involved with the youth in our communities. Parents especially need to take a more active role in their children's lives and teach them right from wrong. Together we can stop youth violence in America.

Brandy Spoon

Alaska ChalleNGe



Teen Violence

You might wonder why I'm writing an essay about teen violence and you might also wonder what I know about it. Believe it or not I know a lot about teen violence; I grew up around it at school and I never thought it would hit home. But it did. My sister, who is 15 years old now, is in a juvenile detention center for teen violence, a mistake that she has been dealing with for about a year and a half.

She has been in and out of juvenile detention centers for all of that year and a half. The reason why it matters so much to me is because my sister and I were best friends up until that time. Now I feel like I lost my best friend. Now that she is locked up I can only see her every Sunday for an hour and only if she doesn't get into trouble. I know I should be thankful that my sister is still alive because I know that it could have been worse. That is why I would still like to educate the public and the community about teen violence and how it affects them. Hopefully they can recognize violent tendencies in their young children and do their best to prevent them from becoming violent. Normally you can tell if a child is going to become violent because the child starts out with minor offenses and then they may eventually work up to be more serious offenses.

The public and the community needs to know how to recognize the problem, be able to approach the problem appropriately, also try to correct the individuals violent acts. I'm sure we all know it takes a village to raise a child and the violent offenders need someone's help to correct his behavior, but it is mostly up to them. They want to have to change though before anyone else can help them.

I would also like to tell everyone what they can do about teen violence as well as what I can do. Everyone can mentor to a teen or a child who is at risk of being or is violent. The child needs to know that someone cares for them and is willing to help them become a better citizen. The child also needs to recognize their goals in life. Then the mentor can help them achieve those goals. This also helps the child see that there is more to life than violence and that violence leads to a dead end in life. Now I would like to close my essay by saying that since there isn't one reason or cause for violence that there also isn't one good solution.

Ann Dahn

Arizona ChalleNGe



Violence in My Family

Youth violence has affected my life because it almost killed my cousin. My cousin got involved in gangs. She started drinking and doing a lot of drugs. Because she was into all that stuff, she started getting violent and beating on her mom and other people in our family. She is the one who got me started on drugs and caused me to start getting violent with people in my family.

Growing up in violent homes is probably one of the biggest causes of youth violence. Television influences children as they are growing up. Television teaches children that blowing things up is a good thing. TV shows and movies that children watch in their homes show violence all the time. Between television and parents who are violent, children today see a lot of violence in their homes. When these children get older they tend to get involved in gangs, drugs and alcohol. To be initiated into a gang, and to be cool, kids are pressured into doing bad and violent things. Then when these children get out of hand, their parents can't take it so they kick them out. The only place for them to go is foster homes, the streets, or jail.

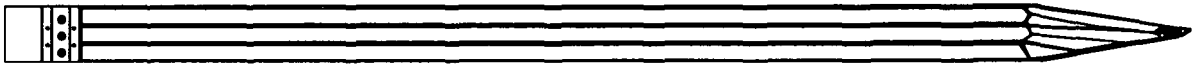
I would like to do something about breaking this chain of events and ending the problem violence creates in my community. I could go to schools and talk to young people about how violence has affected me and how it could affect their lives. Maybe this could help kids before they get involved with anything too dangerous. I could also go to hospitals, group homes, detention centers and to the streets to talk with kids about getting their lives straightened out. I would like to have a future as a public speaker and share my experiences with other youth to help get their lives straightened out. I would like to help them understand that they can choose a better life. They don't have to spend their lives in an unpleasant place; they don't have to hurt themselves, and they don't have to hurt the people who love them.

The reason why I would do everything I could to help kids is because I used to do drugs. I did a lot of drugs. One day I came home high and hit my mom. I felt really bad. I sat in Durango for a day and a night thinking about what I did to the person who loved me and cared about me the most. It hurt me when she came to see me in jail. What really surprised me is that she still loved me and wanted to help me. I went to a rehab program for thirty days because my mom wanted me to get my life straightened out. I stayed clean for a little while, but then I started the same stuff again. I got arrested again and this time went to a detention center in Yavapi County, AZ. I was there overnight. I had court the next day. I was on probation for awhile, but then I got off for doing so many hours of community service hours. While I was on probation, I never wanted to stay home because I wanted to be with my friends. My probation officer told me about Project ChalleNGe. I decided to go to Project ChalleNGe, so I can make something of myself instead of being a druggie and getting in trouble.

In the long run, I don't want other kids to end up like me and have to either be in jail or Project ChalleNGe. I want kids to know they can straighten out their lives and stop killing each other over colors or because they are too high on drugs.

Alvin Johnson

Arizona ChalleNGe



Dear Lord Don't Let Me Die Tonight

The lyrics overcome my mind as I bob my head to the beat. The night is still young and everything is going the way I planned.

We enter the driveway to my friend's house. I can barely focus but I realize I'm drunk and about to get faded. So now I gotta' slow my drinking. As we enter the house a fight breaks out but is quickly broken up.

Later into the night my friend and one of her friends get into an argument. I ask what happened. She tells me it was just over some stupid stuff and not to worry. So I go out in the back of the house for about a half-hour when all of a sudden, pop, a gun shot rings out. I hear screaming! She's dead! Do something. I run up and see a puddle of blood, people all around in a panic, crying and screaming. I pushed my way into the crowd. I could see my friend lying in a pool of blood with a hole in her head. As I stand there shocked and speechless, I feel a great deal of anger overcome my body.

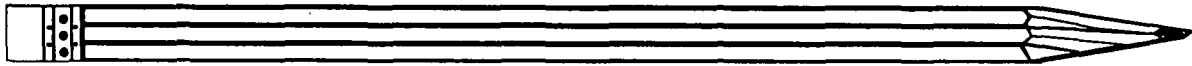
Today violence is considered entertainment but I know it goes way beyond entertainment. I know youth violence has affected people in different ways. I think the parents go through the most pain dealing with the loss of their child. I have never really been able to understand why people kill one another. My friend once told me it always has a purpose; it had to be done. When I was growing up my friend used to tell me to always stand up for myself and never let anyone diss me. So that is exactly what I did. I found out that led to a lot of fights.

When I got older everybody wanted to be a gangsta; wanted to pack a gun and wanted to act hard. I started to see what was going on. My peers started changing, my friends started dying and my cousin ended up in prison. I started thinking of ways not to end up in the same situation.

When I was younger I never thought of talking to a person as a way of dealing with a problem, until one time that I got counseled for fighting. My teacher told me to try and talk to the person before I started swinging. I think a lot of violence can be ended by using communication. I believe we can end youth violence if we educate the youth of today on other ways to solve their problems. If somebody is dissing you, you don't have to fight. I know that in my life I have been able to end the violence. I choose to not fight. Everyone can make that same choice, and it is all of our responsibility as a society to help educate our youth on how they can end the violence in their lives.

Joshua Hammock

Arkansas ChalleNGe



Roses Are Red, Violence Is Blue

Throughout my life I have enjoyed having fun and being around the people I care about. However, one thing always seems to happen when I am having fun. I get in trouble. I do things others consider bad, or wrong. I only do these things when emotion takes over. I become violent. I become very angry and physically aggressive when I am mad. I try, try my hardest to see if the person I am arguing with is actually dumb enough to provoke me. I want them to bring me to the point of just not caring anymore.

From the time I was a small child violence has played a major part in my life. Violence has cost me friends, loved ones, girlfriends, and my self-respect. All these things because I wanted to be violent. This is one reason why I am like I am today. I allow violence and violent people to influence and control my life. I do not consider who will get hurt. I do not consider the cost of my actions.

Most of the violence today is termed youth violence. Throughout the 90's youth violence has increased. Gangs, abuse in homes, psychotic teenagers, and peer pressure are only some of the reasons why violence among my generation is on the rise. I have been pressured to join five different gangs, but I chose not to. What will a gang do for me? Nothing except cause trouble and provide an opportunity for me to hurt or even kill others. For the opportunity to wear a colored piece of cloth? It is just not worth it!

I was abused as a small child, however I did not know it was abuse. As far as I was concerned, it was only punishment. It was not until I was ten-years-old that mom explained it to me. The reasons she offered were that my father was an alcoholic and he just lost it. Since his death, I have become abusive. Although I know I am not, I try to be better than everyone else. I have wanted people to respect me for who I am not for what I do. I mess up too much trying to earn people's respect. I have a tendency to want to make others mad. I do not take responsibility for what I do. I want to be violent when I do not get my way.

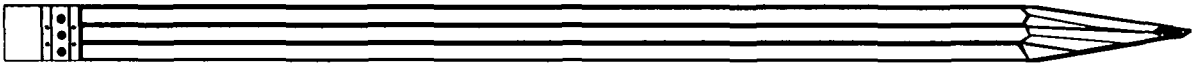
I think the biggest thing that makes people violent is peer pressure. I believe many of the troubled youth, myself included, would be better off if we did not allow people to control us. We allow people to influence us in negative ways, as opposed to positive ways. If everyone would be their own person not much of a problem would exist. Since we want to be cool, or better than everyone else. Everyone has his own solutions to violence.

What I can do about youth violence is to take charge of my future by not allowing myself to become involved in negative situations-situations I know will ultimately turn violent. I am now aware I must change my ways not only to keep myself safe, but to protect the innocent bystanders. If I accept and apply the positive influences around me, then and only then can I become the outstanding role model for others to respect. Thus, those whom I care about will look up to me. I have now initiated steps to become the positive person I know exists in me. As a positive person and as a role model I can gain the respect of others.

I can use my abilities to help others to realize, understand and change their attitudes. In other words, I can positively influence others to identify methods by which they can control their anger. Some avenues I employ are creative writing, music, or expressing my own feelings regarding violence through poetry as opposed to turning violent. I can do things to help others overcome their frustrations. Probably the biggest thing I can do is to demonstrate the self-control I am developing. However, before I can attain these goals, I must first complete the change in myself.

Ebony Morgan

Arkansas ChalleNGe



Violence and Drugs -- How It Affects Our Lives

In my opinion, youth violence is kids killing kids. This is not a good thing. Kids are what make a brighter future. Why would anyone want to take that away? I have a story about violence and the impact upon my life.

My story begins on a summer day. Some friends and I were at my cousin's house. We were sitting on the porch laughing and talking. We took notice of a car, which had stopped on the street, just up from where we were. My cousin called to her boyfriend, he was around the corner from where we were sitting. She asked him if he knew the car, or the people in the car. He responded, "Yeah, those are the dudes I had an argument with the other day."

Five minutes later the car sped towards the house. As the car approached the still, humid, summer air filled with the sound of gunfire. Pop, pop, pop, pop. We scattered, running in the house and we dove for cover, my life flashing before my eyes. Before my cousin's boyfriend could find safety, three rounds had found their mark. He was hit in the back, leg, and neck. The damage was done; he died instantly. These few, senseless seconds had a traumatic effect on me. I have never experienced anything like this before. I was in shock. My cousin entered into a deep depression. Her boyfriend was only seventeen-years-young. He was still in high school. He dreamed of becoming a basketball player, but his dreams ended on that fateful day.

I believe drugs and gangs spawn violence. I know more kids would want to be in school as opposed to being maimed or dead. If youth today understood the value of education, they would not need to worry about things as senseless as drive-by shootings. Drugs and gangs is a waste of time. The sad truth about gang banging is that neighborhoods are destroyed and lives are permanently changed.

Youth today drop out of school to join gangs. Membership in a gang leads to involvement with the use and distribution of drugs. Some parents use illegal drugs. Their kids lose touch with their families, therefore they join gangs to have a sense of belonging. However, when kids join gangs they end up robbing, stealing and killing. This is not right!

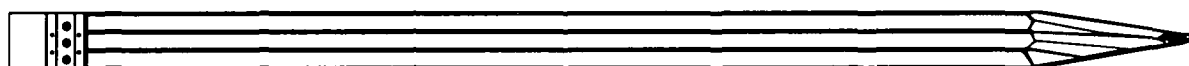
I believe the best solution to youth violence is to stress education and to keep our future leaders in school. We must spend more time with our children and encourage them to do better. We must teach them to say no to drugs. The more we participate in our children's lives, the better off they will be. Deep, deep down inside I know this to be true.

Programs exist for kids and young adults. Some of these programs teach the youth of today to do the correct things. Unfortunately these programs do not always work. Sometimes the people impressionable youth look up to may be involved in some form of gang activity, or the use of illicit drugs. Therefore, kids might be negatively impacted. To make sure this does not occur, parents must sit down and talk with their kids-not at their kids. If the parent does not step forward, someone else might, the wrong someone else.

I strongly suggest parents take charge. Teach your kids to do the right thing. I believe today's youth would be better off if they had a strong role model in their life. Someone to steer them in the right direction. Without our kids, there will be no future. Remember to work with your kids. Encourage and enable your kids to make responsible choices. Teach them to stand on their own two feet. Otherwise, one of their future summers may end up like mine.

Shirley Kirkpatrick

California ChalleNGe



Saving What Isn't There

He takes my hand with a smiling, almost disguising glance.
He stares at me and holds a defensive stance.
Anxiety rises within me...
"Do everything right. Don't make him mad."
He's different around people -- his moods are ironclad.
During the day he's my angel, but there's a mask that overshadows my world.
He turns into a tyrant at night; it gets worse when he drinks.
It's my fault, though...
I'm the one that makes him so angry -- he drinks so that he can calm down and not feel worse...
It isn't his fault that it doesn't always work.

People say he's not good for me and that I should leave.
I don't want to, he's the only one I want and need.
They say that he doesn't treat me right, but as long as he says he loves me, I'm all right.
They say I'm too young to have to worry about hiding my face when he hits me...
It really isn't his fault; but I guess they don't see.
So I stay.

He tells me he loves me, and that he's sorry.
He's never meant to hurt me.
I believe he will change...
I keep my mouth shut and hope that he will change.
He loves me
If I am good, he'll realize that he won't need to yell and scream at me.

I went to the doctor last week.
They said I was pregnant.
It was strange -- the emotions it sent.
Confusion because I'm so young with no way to support a baby.
Happiness because, who better with than the one I care most about?

So I went to him; I took a deep breath and sat him down.
At first, he seemed calm all around.
He smiled, but he looked away, nodding his head.
The happiness in my heart turned dead.
His eyes then gazed upon me with strict conviction.
He screamed every hurtful thing he could, blaming me with no restrictions.
He swung around and I fell backward... blinded by the blow.
I saw nothing, but could feel every sharp blow. The excruciating pain is something I hope you never know
I have been emotionally scared for the rest of my life.
You've no idea how many times I've looked so longingly at that same sharp knife.

He said it was my fault.
I believed him; he was drunk, he didn't know what he'd done.
Yeah right!

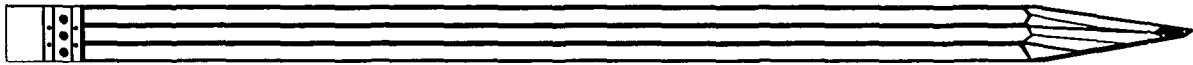
I went back to the doctor yesterday.
I'm not pregnant anymore.
I can't take this hell anymore.
I'll never be able to hear my own baby cry for me.
There was too much damage... he hit me too hard.
But he says he loves me.

Apologies aren't good enough anymore.
My life until now has been a huge hole in which he has ceased to bore.
During the day, he was my angel, but there was a mask that overshadowed my world.
People said he wasn't good for me and that I should have left him.
They said he didn't treat me right.
They said I'm too young to have to worry about hiding my face when he hits me...
They had a point.

I have my whole life to live now, and I know it wasn't my fault.
I'll never see my own children or be able to advise them.
But I can speak out to others, be it friends or complete strangers.
I told my story... I've overcome my anger.
Break the cycle. Let your children live while there's still a chance.
Save yourself and take your own defensive stance!

Eddie Moise

California ChalleNGe



Do the Write Thing

Life and it's struggles, it's twists, and it's turns.
They leave me with nothing, but scratches and burns.
I have no friends, just associates now.
As I wear my hat on a troublesome brow.

The things that we do, and the things that we say.
The wrongs we commit through the course of a day.
Living out most of my days with a frown.
I got from the stress on the wrong side of town.

The stress of my mom working two jobs for money.
There's a storm in my head and it never gets sunny.
My nose always runny, my eyes blood shot red.
When on graveyard shift, I don't get to see bed.

I'm not at all rich. If I said it I lied.
I said it to cover the darkness inside.
Eating my dinner from plates that I broke.
Eating while hoping real soon that I might choke.

Circumstances tend to make us do bad.
In hopes we attain what we wish we had.
To do what's right, I feel my eyes are blinded.
I'm used to having thoughts that are criminal minded.

These are the affects of the world I was raised in.
Like a stain on my brain about the size of a basin.
I do have a section of my brain that is positive.
The section that I ask myself "what are my odds to live?"

This section in my brain is the size of a raisin.
My religion and my habits are completely adjacent.
Deep down I know it can't rain all the time.
I'm not very optimistic, but I can wait for the sunshine.

I can wait for better days, a better time.
By reminding myself happiness is a state of mind.
I'll take a functional family out of dysfunctional situation.
And give them a weak of pleasure for every day of aggravation.

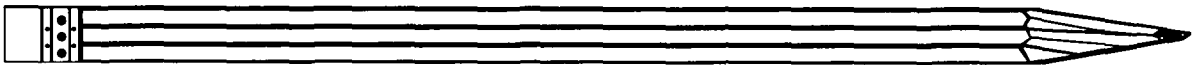
I don't have to be influenced by the demons that surround me.
Because my mother said the blood of Jesus Christ grounds me.
Determined to make my mother proud of what she raised.
I do the right thing as a form of showing her praise.

Instead of looking at the whole, I finally see the donut.
I never had a childhood I was forced to be a grown-up.
It's true, life moves pretty fast. You'll sin today.
The next thing you know you're in hell, ready to pay.

There's no time to sit around and play in the hallways.
So in large ways and small ways, do good things always.
Life isn't fair and when it bites you feel the sting.
But never let it stop you from doing the write thing.

Mike Graves

California STARBASE



If You Don't Stand for Something, You'll Fall for Anything

Violence and drug abuse are very serious problems that youths deal with everyday. This issue directly affects me along with millions of other young people. We are faced with the pressure of our peers often to try both legal and illegal drugs. Drug abuse is related to crime by affecting the users' behavior, which can lead to violence. By choosing to participate in drugs in any way, you are allowing yourself to be involved in many dangerous situations. For example:

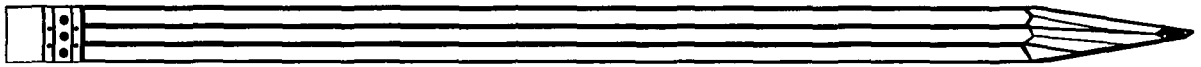
- * Competing for drug customers, if you sell, and for suppliers, if you use.
- * Getting involved in arguments among drug users and those who choose to sell drugs.
- * Being in locations where illegal drugs are generally sold and where crime is high.

There are many reasons that youth become violent and try drugs of any kind. Violence is a learned behavior. Our media teaches us all that violence is just a sign of strength, and that there are no consequences for our actions. We see violence on television, at the movie theatres and on video games. Commercials and movies send a message that drinking alcohol and smoking tobacco are cool, leaving us to educate ourselves against the mixed messages being sent. We learn from what we see, and unfortunately sometimes our guardians are the bad influence or role model. How are we supposed to be strong and say no to drugs and violence if we are seeing it in our homes? When a young child sees an adult act violently, he is being taught to do the same. If drugs are being used or sold around me, why shouldn't I try them? When children see adults behaving badly, they start to think of this as normal behavior. Youths are also taught by other youths to make bad decisions. We've seen that happening in a lot of the school shootings that have happened recently. This is the kind of stuff that scares me. What if I make a fellow student angry, and they have learned to react violently? Will they use a weapon to hurt me? I should have the right to feel safe at school, as well as the right to leave my window open at night without feeling threatened for my family or myself. Due to all the violence around me, I--at the age of eleven years old--have to worry about these things. We all need to fight less and talk more.

Young people are led to believe that trying drugs, tobacco and alcohol will make them feel grown up, help them be accepted by their peers, cause them to feel good and satisfy their curiosity. None of these excuses are worth your health and peace of mind. Know instead that you can stand up for what you believe and know to be true. I choose to respect myself and set an example for my friends, my family and for those younger than me by not smoking, drinking or taking drugs. Acting violent and taking drugs are not cool. They can land you in jail or worse--kill you or someone else. Why take the chance? If your so-called friends make you feel uncomfortable about saying no to drugs and violence, you need to find some real friends who will respect and support your choices. Stand up for what you believe in, even if it is not the popular thing to do. Make the choice to be nonviolent and to reject drugs, and help others do the same. If you see someone who is not educated about the harmful effects of drugs and violence, share you knowledge with them. Smoking and doing drugs are not cool. If you want to do them, just think to yourself: "I am the geek, not the smart kid with glasses." Take pride in yourself. Remember, if you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything.

Ashley Stone

California STARBASE



Violence and Drug Abuse

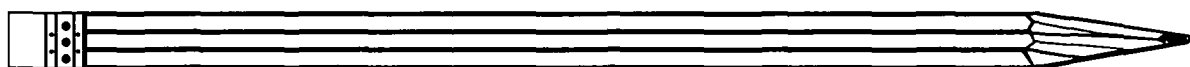
How has youth violence/drug abuse affected my life? I didn't go to school in a very good area from second through fifth grades. Our school playground was vandalized by a teenage gang, which wrote threats and cuss words on our slide. Many children in the basic program didn't come from very good families and fought a lot. A kid in my class was suspended for fighting and saying racist things about some other kids. We also had a policeman come to our school and warn us about gang members and what to do if they came and wanted you to do drugs. I didn't feel safe in my school because teenagers that were smoking or playing rap music on their boom boxes were always walking around.

What are the causes of youth violence/drug abuse? I think that kids might be more interested in doing drugs or violent things if violence or drugs are used in their homes or somewhere that they go to a lot, like school or a friend's house, or if their parents don't give them support or interact with them. They might feel like they have to resort to drugs and violence to get the attention they want (need, crave?). Peer pressure can also be a cause of youth violence and drug abuse. One cause of violence and drug abuse I've heard a lot about is kids seeing violence or drugs being used on television. After watching, kids think, "If they can do it, why can't I?" It's hard to say no when a friend or bully is pressuring you to do drugs, and once you use something like crack or weed, like it or not-you're going to want more and then you're going to get hooked.

What can I do about youth violence and drug abuse? If one of my friends is having problems, I can talk to them and help them out because, even if their parents don't do drugs, a kid could start trying drugs if they have a problem that doesn't get resolved. Kids like me hear about drugs and violence every day from the news, other television shows or other people. It's not like we never come in contact with drugs (mostly cigarettes), so it's not like we can never start because there is no opportunity. That's why a lot of kids nowadays do drugs and fight more than kids did forty years ago. My teacher is a really good example of what not only kids should do with each other, but what grownups should do with us, too. Talk about the consequences of doing drugs and fighting. A lot of times we have discussions about these kinds of topics in class, and I believe it's good for us. It's also a good thing I can do with my friends. Also, if I'm having problems, I should tell my parents about it. Even though right now doing drugs or getting involved in gang activity is the last thing I'd want to do, a lot of teens' parents wish their kids had talked to them before they even considered drugs and gangs.

Tania Del Valle Torres

Georgia ChalleNGe



Drug Abuse and Youth Violence: A Life or a Lie?

If anything is repeatedly presented as the truth, even if it is a lie, that thing tends to become accepted as the truth. The truth becomes associated with real life, and we have the strange result that a lie now appears to be "life", and the lie lives on its own. I have spent some time thinking about how drugs and violence have affected me, what causes these things to be, and what can be done about them.

To begin with, drugs and violence have affected my life in ways I will never forget. I have always been surrounded by drugs and violence at schools and in my communities, though it was difficult for me to realize just how pervasive they were. I was always confused because they were following me around wherever I was and they seemed a part of "life" and I did not see them as a "lie." Even when I was trying to get away from people, who were using drugs and creating violence, they were always there and I didn't know what to do. Eventually, however, I saw enough of them to know that I did not want that kind of "life" and I came to know that addiction can make you sick and even kill you. I saw that it was a waste of time to be involved with these two "lies" that promised so much, but were both short on delivery of anything positive. I learned a lot through my childhood, and especially in my teenage life, about drugs and violence. I am glad that I decided that these things would not be important to me, and I want to try my best to help people not make that mistake.

Secondly, I believe that there are probably many causes of youth violence and drug abuse. One cause is that some teens have so much anger inside of them. The reason is not always clear, but the anger is there. Another cause is the lack of self-control that teens exhibit. And then, there are those teens that were raised in a neighborhood that had a lot of drugs and violence in it and it this seems normal (as was my case sometimes). Additionally, some teens think it is "cool" to use drugs because it makes them high, or their friends use them and they feel peer pressure to do so as well. Teens do not want to disappoint their so-called friends. Problems with school, or at home with parents, brothers, and sisters, may also add to the problem. Some teens may just be too scared and confused to ask for help and advice. All of these factors can contribute to drug use and abuse, which in turn, can lead to violence.

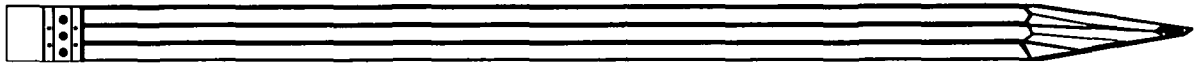
Lastly, there are some things I think I can do to help prevent youth violence and drug abuse, even if this kind of abuse and violence seem to be everywhere. One thing that could be done is to have youth themselves speak out against such. Young people, who have first-hand knowledge from real "life," and the false "life" of drugs, etc., could be a powerful weapon in this war. Also, publishing articles and other printed information, and spreading this information widely, making it available everywhere, could help. Another thing would be to understand that drug and violence addicts need serious help, not just condemnation. What they are doing is wrong, for them and for society, but they still need help in rehabilitation programs and other assistance if this problem is to be solved.

To conclude, I know that drugs and violence have affected my life. I have some bad memories of what these things can do to friends and families. I can see some of the causes of this plague on

our land. But, I also see some things that can be done to help with these problems. The big thing is, we have to stop talking about it and start doing something. Action does indeed speak louder than words and we can start to change the "lie" into a "life".

Doug Smith

Georgia ChalleNGe



What Do We Believe About Violence?

Voltaire said, "If we believe absurdities, we will commit atrocities." From the time we are old enough to remember seeing a picture on television, observe other members of our society, or even so much as turn on a radio, human beings at the beginning of the 21st century are bombarded with scenes of violence. We begin to believe in the absurdity that violence is a part of life and is simply to be accepted. With the progression of age, and due to the elements in certain urban environments, some individuals are so smitten with this virulent cancer that they are afraid to even go outside, rendered completely asunder by the implicit threat of attack, assault, or murder. But I ask, is this vitriolic behavior causative or symptomatic of our atrophied society? I would suggest that rampant violence stems from a belief system resulting from an absence of purpose in an individual's everyday life, the complete degradation of morals and civics, and the acceptance of ideas and behaviors that are internally destructive to ourselves, our families, and our society.

First, there is an obvious absence of direction in young people in today's urban and suburban cultures. There is an embrace of a *laissez-faire* attitude in conjunction with an absence of initiative and plain old "gumption." The consequence is a young population benign in respect to conviction or purpose; in essence, a proverbial "Lost Generation" open to the impression and influence of the media, peers, and other sources that neglect holistic development. It is a society of youths desperately searching for a lodestar, seeking an understanding of themselves and their environment. Due to the sensualistic disposition of adolescence, youth often imbibe in and practice teachings that glorify their id; teachings that gratify their senses and romanticize apathy and affliction. Regardless of how I hear myself and other young people declare their maturity, intelligence, and virtuosity, I must remember in humility how impressionable we are. We are malleable products of our environment.

Furthermore, there has been, and continues to be, an exponential erosion of traditional values, time-honored morals, and practical civics. For a host of reasons, beginning as early as the anal phallic stages of development, children are witnessing an absolute rejection of what can be summarized as simply etiquette and respect. There is utter disregard for common courtesy as it has been deemed frivolous and prudish by adolescents. The youth of this country has rebelled against morality, and dismissed it as bucolic ideals and adages long out-dated. In many cases, though such values were never even presented. In these situations, the affected were neglected and left even more vulnerable to noxious propaganda. For whatever reason, be it ignorance or remonstrance, young people are behaving completely contrary to the historical moral guidelines of a healthy society.

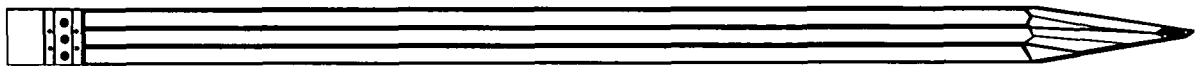
Finally, and perhaps most importantly, adolescents are accepting ideas that are antithetical to that of a healthy, congenial body. It is simply unacceptable for one to assume that in any instance it is necessary to administer physical correction or punishment to a peer. It is absolutely atrocious to believe that inflicting pain on another human being indicates superiority. And, it's just wrong to subscribe to the notion that individuals are equipped with faculties or justification that warrant the death of another human being. Yet while these words are being written, and every time they are read, someone is teaching these philosophies while a student is adopting them. Right now, gangs

are inflicting such messages on their initiates and practicing them in the streets. Moreover, the media are sensationalizing a violent tragedy, excluding not one gory detail; essentially capitalizing off such macabre tragedies. Currently, there is a tremendous epidemic that expostulates and advocates detrimental ideas. Ideas that, when scrutinized under the light of pragmatism, are obviously misguided and dangerous. The horror is that our society has reached a zenith of desensitization, to a point where young people don't realize how vulgarly, profanely, and violently they are behaving. Furthermore, in some cases where the behavior is realized, these adolescents believe their behaviors are justified. Consequently, there is a community of pseudo-cognizant, self-righteous youth who are acting out violently.

There seems little room left for anything other than a bleak conclusion. But, there is hope. I would suggest that there is more intelligence, more creativity, more aptitude, and more potential than there has ever been in this country. And, there is a will. Every day nearly, I witness an awakening that is indicative of the presence of a moral compass and a desire for improvement. The question is whether or not we will recognize, nurture, and contribute to this movement. I would insist that it is of the utmost value to our society that we as individuals, families, and communities are proactive instead of reactive regarding perpetration of travesties. If we try to harness instead of subjugate the talents and propensities of our youth, we begin helping to make a lost, straying generation. If we more often offer and exemplify virtuosity and citizenship, I am certain that others will follow, and I think we are long overdue to rebuke and reveal the truths obscured by the relative myths in our adolescent societies. As long as we allow untruths to govern our world, we will behave as such. If we are heathens, treat ourselves as heathens, and think our heathen thoughts, then we are heathens. If we are meritorious, honest, courteous, and kind, we will give back to the world more than we have taken away, and this belief in the necessity violence will be weakened, and perhaps disappear.

Liza Lagazo

Hawaii ChalleNGe



Your Choice Makes a Difference

Youth violence is created by what we see and hear, and basically by the surroundings of our everyday life. But you can make a difference in the effect it has on you because you have a choice on how you let it influence you and others. Youth violence has affected my life in many ways. When I was around four years old, I remember being introduced to violence. My mom fought with her boyfriend and pulled a knife on herself. I learned to think that violence was normal. My brother used to beat me when my dad wasn't home. His girlfriend was mad at him and he didn't want to beat her because she was at the point of leaving him, so I was his punching bag. My dad and my brother often got into arguments. One fight at a family member's birthday got out of hand because my brother was mad with his girlfriend. My dad stepped in and there they went. My brother was drinking at the time, which probably made his anger escalate. Anyway, he punched my uncle (who later needed stitches above his eye), he bit my dad on his chest and he tore his skin off. It took five of my uncles to try to calm him down. I think you sort of get the picture how my life went.

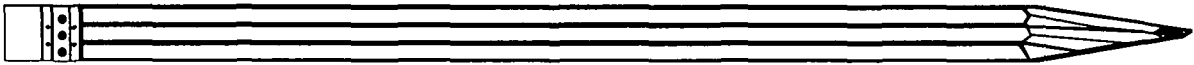
I feel I was emotionally affected due to the fact that I'm so depressed by these episodes that happened throughout my life. It's very difficult for me to trust people or let them try to get close to me. That experience with my brother made me feel that if someone like him hurt me by beating me (when he is supposed to be someone I could trust, rely on, and be the one to protect me), for him to show me such the opposite, than who can I trust? They say blood is thicker than water, but in this case blood made blood.

All the violence that occurred in my life influenced me to react to my problems with violence. Watching people beat each other gave me the idea that that was the way to deal with problems. When I had a problem with someone I resolved it by fighting and yelling; like how it was with my family. It affected me by thinking hitting and yelling was a solution to solving problems.

Are there ways that I can help reduce the rate of violence? Well let's see. Yes I can, but it is totally up to individuals to choose violence or to choose to live a more assertive life by resolving problems correctly and by not letting themselves or others be influenced by negative actions. I can give advice to youngsters about how violence is not the right way of solving things in life. A lot is learned by where we live and whom we live around. I can also choose not to continue to be a part of violence. Will these things really make enough of a difference? I think not. With the amount of violence we have, it would take thousands of positive choices from around the country to actually see a decrease in the violence. I think we all have to set an example for younger ones, so they can grow to pass on what they learn. From there it should be a chain reaction. If violence can go on like a chain, why can't a positive way of life go on like a chain?

Edward Powers

Hawaii ChalleNGe



A Race Against Time

" To live is to suffer, but to survive, well... that's' to find meaning in the sufferin'."
(DMX)

A young boy is born on March 30, 1982 at 1:03 a.m. He sees light for the first time. In his mother's arms there is tenderness and love. He feels secure. A special day for a special person. But little did that boy know that he had no father. His father died two weeks earlier in a head on collision. In the other car, four drunken teenagers survived the car crash. To live is to suffer? Why is that?

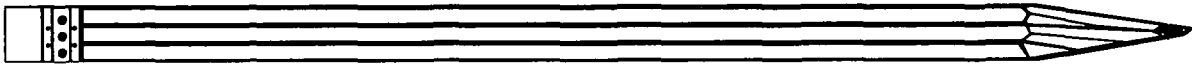
Suffer? Yes there's suffering in this world, but to live is to suffer? No, to live is what you make it. As for me, I suffered a lot from the day I was born. Growing up knowing I have no father turned me towards youth violence. I was raised in a society where there was nothing but violence and I quickly adapted to it. My mom remarried and now I have a stepfather. Violence had such an impact on me; I acted like he wasn't even there. I truly disrespected him because he wasn't my birth father. Plus, watching all those "gangsta" movies and listening to all those ghetto rap songs made me want to be a thug. I wanted to kill people, just like I saw on the movies. I felt like it wasn't no thang. Just pull the trigga and off with their heads--Thug Life! I wanted respect. I wanted people to look up to me and to fear me. I don't know why I wanted that feeling. I guess I just wanted to be bad. Wherever I went, I wanted people to recognize me. I loved it when I walked down the street and people said, "Yo, there goes that crazy mug, Ed Dog." You can say I wanted attention.

That's how hard youth violence hit me. Just me and my boys living the thug life. We couldn't be stopped. My society was like that. Kids wanted to be somebody that they weren't. Just trying to be hard, so people can look up to them or people can fear them. And the causes for all this is? That's how we are, that's our society. In our minds, that's the way it has to be. If you are black, it's like you have to live this way. And as for me, being raised in that society, it made me somebody I wasn't. A kid walking around with his head cut off. And to some people, youth violence is the love of their life. What a shame.

I plan to do something about youth violence. I plan to talk to individuals that are just like me. I will tell them how my life was. How I didn't respect myself. I only did things because I wanted to be hard and I wanted attention. I never truly looked into my heart to find myself. I was living a lie. I will tell them to look into their heart and find who they really are. We are all able to do something more than violence. Violence shows stupidity. Use your heart and your mind. Hopefully a domino affect will occur and youths can make a difference in their lives. I would also like to see after school activities where youths play games and sports. They can rap, sing, or do anything that takes them off the streets. I feel that these ideas can work. What kind of ideas do you have?

Erica Freeman

Illinois ChalleNGe



What I Can Do to Stop the Violence in My Life

To eradicate the violence in my surroundings, every individual needs to converge and laboriously discuss the situation in order to revolutionize the problem. After divulging in conversations, assiduously we need to come up with a tentative explanation to form a solution. The final step in elimination of violence would be unanimously converting the negatives into positives.

Lack of communication and social activities play a quizzical role in tumultuous acts, which leads to turbulent behaviors. Edifying would help disaffiliate oneself from malarkey, therefore emending eloquence. Once we have accomplished such a diminutive, yet adamant task, there will be very little to complete.

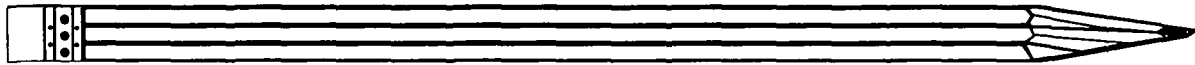
Once the problem is discussed, we must arduously ruminate on a logical method to avoid future violence. Supportive, explicable resolutions and assurance are the main ideas we need to focus on in order to make it reality.

When we have finally agreed on ways to change our environment, so that it may behoove us, the last step would be persistence. Because this is a complicated assignment it must involve teamwork. During the process of teamwork, together everyone accomplishes a lot more and it facilitates the job so it gets done faster.

In conclusion, lacking association causes a flabbergasting part in today's violence. The only way to abate the violence is by communication and then you will find that problems can easily be resolved by discussing instead of fussing.

Bernard Lyles

Illinois ChalleNGe



What I Can Do to Stop the Violence in My Life?

There are a lot of things that I could do to stop the violence in my life. For starters, I would have to stay away from the people who I know condone violence. I would also have to spend less time watching television and listening to music that has a lot of violent content. Last but not least, I would have to change my whole outlook on life in order to stop the violence.

Violence is everywhere I go in the world. In order for me to stop the violence in my life, I would have to stay away from the people who I know condone violence. There are a lot of people in the world who do nothing other than condone violence. These people make it seem fun to hurt someone or commit violent acts toward another person. If I stay away from these people I'm sure I wouldn't have violent thoughts in my mind. It's people like these who plant thoughts into young minds and make other people become violent as well. In order for me to stop the violence in my life my first step would be to stay away from people who condone violence.

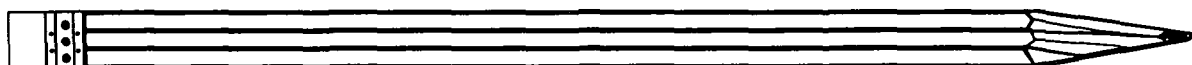
Another thing I could do to stop the violence in my life is to watch less television and listen to less violent music. A lot of people say that television and music can't influence people. I beg to differ because in a lot of cases watching television and listening to violent music makes me want to commit violent acts. When I see and hear a lot of violence everyday all-day that makes it almost like second nature to commit a violent act. Therefore, in order to stop the violence in my life I would have to cut down on my television and radio usage.

In order to stop the violence in my life I would have to change my whole outlook on life. What I mean is I would have to change the way I think about different things. In some situations my first reaction would be to resort to violence. It's just the way I am. So in order to stop the violence I would have to change my whole way of thinking. When I think about violence it's usually not a big deal but in actuality it should be a big deal because it is time for all the violence to stop!

In conclusion, there are many things that I could do to stop the violence in my life. The three things that I just stated are the main things that I need to do. I plan to do all that I can to prevent as much violence as I can.

Shreevia Scott

Kentucky ChalleNGe



Teen Violence

Many teens are dropping
Many parents are crying.
What do we do to stop all this pain?

Listen to what I have to say,
Could I talk to gang members and ask them why?
Would I get the right answer or a dead lie?

Why kill someone over a color?
Would you kill over skin and their hair?
What if I wear a color you didn't like,
Would you make me a corpse and stop my mother's light?

So, listen to what I have to say,
Would I be wasting my time by trying to save another's life?
Put the guns down and take a look at life.

We are the future and we can make it right.
The future is in our hands.
So, come together young people and take a stand.

We hold the key of success!
So, put violence to rest and
Help me to protest.

Killing over material things can't help anyone.
Drugs, money and other things don't make sense.
So, why kill a youth over something that means nothing?

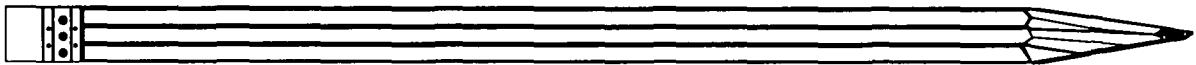
Many friends that I have known, have since gone cold.
Walking through the prison's door,
Praying for a special glow.

Once again, listen to what I have to say.
Maybe after all, we can make this challenge weigh.
Why lie six feet deep when you can live many feet high?
Because heaven is where you want to fly.

So, put down your guns,
And, take your time.
Because the future is losing great minds.

Jason Teegarden

Kentucky ChalleNGe



Teen Violence

Violence has affected my life in different ways. I lost one of my friends a week before I came to Bluegrass Challenge Academy by drinking and driving. They were going 80mph down a curvy hill and lost control. One of my other good friends got kidnapped two years ago and she still has not been found. A friend of mine was shot to death about a year ago. Also, I have had my own problems. Before I got my life straight, I was a heavy drinker and I did drugs. But, one day I looked at myself and realized that I was hurting my body and my mind. Why would anyone want to hurt their body when they have to live in that body till death? I set some goals and knew a change had to be made in my life and that is why I am at this Academy to get my education and to learn self-discipline and to be responsible for my own behavior.

All teens should be taught about violence; gang activity, drugs, fighting, and many more troubling things. Today teens are killing each other; one reason for this is because they are in their own little world. One of the leading causes of this generation's teen deaths is due to gang and drug related problems. Teens just don't seem to care anymore, but they do. However, it isn't entirely their fault. Teens are behaving violently because they don't get enough attention and supervision at home. Children should be reared in a positive environment receiving strong and proper guidance from their parents as well as other adults and family members. Violence, drugs and other crimes need to be explained to teens. Teens are not always aware of the negative behavior that can lead to drug use and violence. They live in denial of the use of drugs.

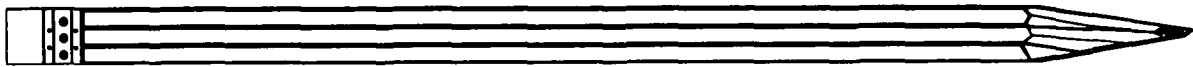
If we choose not to do anything about drugs and violence, think what our children are going to face in the future. We need to start caring more; and have more big brother and sister programs. We should consider keeping troubled teens off the streets and get them into classrooms or academies such as Challenge. However, this will only work as young adults work together as a team. People should get together and work with each other to help change the world. If we don't stop teenage violence, a few years from now it will be our children at high risk. We must develop programs for our teenagers because teens are going to get worse, the killings are going to get higher, and violence will continue to be out of control. We need to start caring for one another and work toward eliminating teen violence. Everyone needs to get involved with youth programs. If they don't, then who will?

As a teen, I have accomplished more than most adults. Working in a big brother and sister program helped me to realize how important it is to help the homeless children. We went into at-risk neighborhoods and cleaned the streets. I am proud to say there is no more gang activity in this neighborhood. We cleaned the graffiti off the buildings. People are living in a more peaceful environment. This has made a difference in teenagers' lives. They are no longer afraid to leave their homes. Children can play in the parks and not be afraid.

I know things cannot be accomplished overnight. I believe that if adults would volunteer and work with teens, a change can be made and stop teen violence.

Ebony Addison

Louisiana ChalleNGe



Communication and Understanding Keys to Ending Violence

Youth violence is a major concern in the world today. Children are becoming more and more violent each day. I believe one of the causes of the increasing violence is the youth feeling the need to fit in. Youth violence is something I want to avoid.

Youth violence has affected my life because I have to be very careful of my environment. I have to really watch how I talk to people because I never know how they will react. It is very painful to have to worry about your children. Parents worry if their children are going to be safe at schools and other public places. I choose not to go that path, because I see on the media where it is hurting people everyday. I believe when it happens to someone in your family that is when you seem to open your eyes to how dangerous youth violence really is.

Some of the causes of youth violence are proving a point, jealousy, and hatred. In some cases, youth do what they are taught or what they have observed. Some use violence as a way to take out anger and frustration. I believe the biggest cause is peer pressure or proving themselves to friends because they think it is cool to hurt someone. Youth also fight or use other types of violence because that person has something they want such as a car, clothes, money, etc. Personally, I believe that violence and its causes are not worth the consequences and do not solve anything.

Some of the ways to prevent youth violence are groups, family support, and evident consequences, which is showing the punishment you would get if you were to participate in violence. Anger management classes help to communicate the reasons why a person is doing what he/she is doing. I believe once a person sees what he/she is doing and realizes or is shown that violence does not help anything, the violence can be stopped. For instance, I got into fights with girls because my friends pressured me, but in the long run, I was by myself when the trouble came. Communication and understanding are the ways to help solve youth violence, I think, because it helped me.

Micah Arceneaux

Louisiana ChalleNGe



Controlling Violence in Today's World

Violence is seen everywhere among the youth of today. It is seen on the streets, at home and in schools across the United States. It is an increasing problem, but it can be brought under control.

Violence among youth affects the lives of almost everyone. It has even affected my own life. During my time in high school, it felt more like that of a prison instead of an institute of learning. Metal detectors, police, security cameras, and locked doors made for a feeling of uneasiness while trying to gain knowledge. Teachers hardly had time to teach without having to break up a fight or keep one from starting. I had a hard time learning when I had to always watch out for my own safety. I have seen my so called friends carried away in handcuffs for beating someone who they just simply did not like. Small issues often turned volatile for no reason. That is why I left.

Youth violence on streets has not only affected me but everyone in my community. Citizens are afraid to leave their homes because they are afraid to be assaulted. Eighty percent of the assaults in my city are committed by males between the ages of seventeen and twenty. No one wants to run the risk of being beaten or killed on the street because some gang says that it is "their turf".

Violence is also a problem in the home. Parents often cannot discipline their children because they want to fight back against the parent. If the teen thinks it is alright to fight a parent who is trying to show the difference between right and wrong, he or she obviously has no regard for anyone else.

Causes of youth violence often vary. Some violence stems from drug abuse. When a deal goes bad, it is most times followed by violent acts which often result in someone's death or injury. Drug use also leads to the abuser trying to get another fix any way possible. This may mean beating or killing an innocent person for a take of a few dollars.

Alcohol abuse commonly brings about violence. I have witnessed people drink and fight for absolutely no reason at all. I have known teenagers to lose all inhibitions when drinking and feel invincible. When they do this, they are more likely to be involved in some type of violent act.

Another cause of youth violence is lack of morals and little or no self-esteem. Some of today's youth cannot see that it is wrong to settle every agreement, big or little, by fighting or shooting. They do not have any real goals or plans set for themselves, so they do not really care about the consequences of their actions. Some teenagers have little self-esteem. In their mind, it makes them feel good to win a fight with another person. It raises their esteem and makes them proud of what they have done.

There is good news though. Something can be done about the problem of youth violence. It will take hard work and dedication from all who are involved. Community coalitions could be formed to let everyone know the causes of youth violence. Counseling sessions could be set up for problem teenagers to let them vent their anger in a controlled environment.

Anger management classes could be set up in high schools to allow teens to better understand how to take control of their anger and aggression. Guidance from teachers and community leaders could be useful to get violent teens to set and achieve positive goals they have set for themselves.

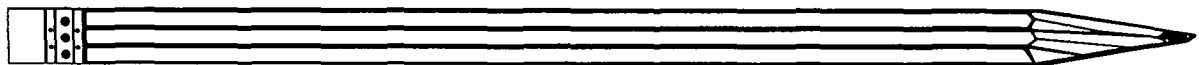
One very important factor in the prevention of youth violence is the avoidance of drugs and alcohol. When drug use in a community increases, so does crime. The key is to rid communities of drugs, which no doubt will be difficult, but can be accomplished. Once this is done, the major cause of youth violence will be gone.

Stricter regulations on alcohol would prevent the youth of America from the consumption of alcohol, therefore, preventing the senseless violence that goes along with it. Underage drinking usually ends up in some type of violence. Controlling how liquor is sold and how people are admitted into bars could be decided by the federal government, and if this law is broken, stiffer penalties could be mandated.

Youth violence has rapidly become an enemy of the nation. It is up to us to come to our own defense. There are options that can be chosen to reduce the number of violent acts committed on and by the youth of America, but it will take the country as a whole make the difference.

Tawanda Michelle Jacobs

Maryland ChalleNGe



Do the Write Thing

Many people are concerned about ways that young people can stop teenage violence. In order to reduce violence, we need to learn ways to reduce or eliminate violence in our schools and our communities.

Schools in general have big problems with kids bringing weapons into schools. Sometimes, kids bring weapons into school because they feel unsafe. Security guards should be assigned to every school. Some schools may need metal detectors to get the perpetrators before they enter the school. Drugs in the private and public schools also cause other violence problems. I believe that once kids get the drugs into schools, it is very hard to get them out. This might sound really serious, I believe that if police dogs come into the schools and walked around sniffing for drugs, it would be a lot easier to detect who has and who does not have drugs. Those who are bringing the drugs into the school should be arrested, regardless of their grade. Anyone who could give drugs to another human being does not care about oneself and need help. Kids are killing each other for clothing that they wear. There was a case in Washington, DC, where a boy was shot for the shoes that he wore. Another case in Washington, DC, was that of two young teens who were killed because they were a smarter than the other kids. Cases like these should not happen and schools are out of control and something needs to be done.

Violence had an impact on my life, as well as many of my friends. A gang jumped me within my neighborhood. There are few gangs in my neighborhood, but they are very violent. I used to be violent myself, but that has changed. I did believe that I had to fight in order to survive. I have now learned that violence is unnecessary. When there is a conflict, I use other techniques to generate resolutions.

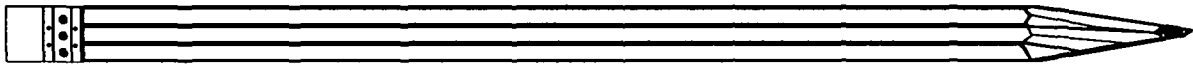
Communities and neighborhoods are other places where violence has risen. Some teens avoid walking out of their homes in fear of being shot. Gangs have become a big problem in lots of neighborhoods. Most of the time, youths join gangs to feel wanted. I see different gangs in my neighborhood and it is frightening to see what young people do to them.

Instead of individuals organizing to start violence, they should be coming together to end it. A solution may be to have a neighborhood watch in every community. Neighborhood watch can be used to stop gangs, burglaries, and other problems in the communities. Drugs are a big problem in communities too. I believe that it is a bigger problem than drugs in the school. That is how drugs get into the schools. Police need to crack down on drug users and distributors. Although, sometimes you can not detect who has it and who does not. The ones who look unsuspecting should not be overlooked, which police sometimes do. Laws should be passed by Congress to keep drugs out of communities.

In conclusion, schools and communities or neighborhoods need a lot of work. It really starts with you. If you want things to change, you have to work. Go to a local neighborhood watch and ask them how you might get involved. In addition, visit your school and ask the principal about school security. Finally, try to get someone to work with you. It is everyone's responsibility to help us decrease the violence and increase the peace.

Brandon Oehler

Maryland ChalleNGe



Do the Write Thing

Violence in this country is a major problem, especially with our youth. I will express how youth violence and drugs have affected my life.

Violence has affected my life many ways for a number of years. I was taught that it takes a stronger person to avoid fights, and I am an example. I was laughed at and ridiculed at school because of my non-violence opinion and the unwillingness to fight back. Everyone thought of me as a runt and weakling. In contrast, I was a lot more psychologically stable than those who teased me. I had low self-esteem and I disliked recess time in fear of getting into fights and getting hurt or in trouble with the teachers. I was never accepted into the "popular" clique and later turned to violence and drugs just to get into this clique. This was the beginning of my use of drugs and the need to use my brother as a role model in hope of being liked in school. After a long time using drugs and getting into fights, I decided to leave my home area and peer pressure to better myself. My parents stuck with me and supported me during this most negative parts of my life.

I joined the ChalleNge program to get away from my problems in my hometown. It has helped me lose my addiction to drugs and violence, and gained new friends who I thought would never accept me. Finally, I am looking at things optimistically, instead of pessimistically. My squad is able to stick together, because each of us has chosen to change for the better. Our role models in this program mainly consist of cadre, staff, and the commanders. They are all good role models, but as we get farther into the program, it seems as if we are retrogressing into what we were before joining the program.

My eldest brother helped me the most with my recovery from drugs. It was difficult, but was determined since he had quit drugs without professional help. In return, he was able to help me and provided me with the strength to "say no to drugs." My parents provided me support as needed. I learned through all of this that a good family will always support you.

Youth violence is directly related to peer pressure and stress. Peer pressure is a big issue because teens are misled into believing that their perceived friends are able to coerce them into believing that everyone who is a role model is a drug user or a gang member. Some individuals believe that the drug high tells them that they have been relieved of their stress, which is false.

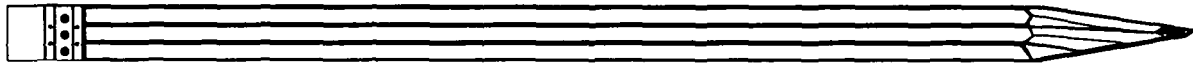
Another cause or cause of youth violence and drugs is entertainment. Many youngsters read about, listen to, and watch violent videos, music, or some form of violence and/or drug entertainment. In turn, the children take after their favorite singers, or movie stars and their roles in movies. Self-discipline in dealing in video movies also needs to be taught in the home, and community.

I believe that it is difficult to change a person who deals in violence and drugs, but we can suggest that they change and support them. It is like the old proverb, "you can lead a horse to water, but you can not force it to drink." In addition, we must teach our youngsters how to relieve stress, avoid peer pressure, and relieve anger. We also need to make it safe and have non-violent in the home, as well around the community. The parents should monitor the children's entertainment.

In conclusion, we must work together. We can not force our children to change, but we can hope, and suggest they change so their children and grandchildren will have a peaceful world to live in.

Ryan Harju

Michigan ChalleNGe



My Future is your Future

We are sorry to interrupt your regularly scheduled program for this special news bulletin from Channel 7 News where we get the news to you first.

"Hello. This is Greg Brown reporting live from Lake City High School in Lake City, Michigan, where yet another shooting has taken place. Witnesses say that the alleged shooter has been taken into custody. The name has not been released but they say the fourteen-year-old freshman brought a gun to school and just started shooting. We know right now that two are dead and five more wounded. The names are yet to be released. This is a small quiet town where they all thought, 'wow this can't happen to us?' Now lets go to a survivor from the shooting. Hello Kathy white." said Greg Brown. "Well what did you see?" said Greg.

"He came in and just started shooting, I don't even know why. It was all so quick. He was such a nice kid," said Kathy as she began to cry.

"Well there you have it folks, another shooting. Now the question is what causes it and what can we do about it? This is Greg Brown signing out for Channel 7 News where we get the news to you first.

We now return you to your regularly scheduled program.

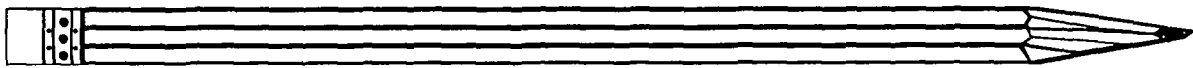
It seems like I hear that every week on the news. When is the shooting going to stop? Violence has to stop. It's getting to the point were I'm afraid to go to school. I wonder am I safe? It makes me sad to think that just anyone of my fellow classmates can snap and go off on a rampage and it's scary.

I think youth violence is caused a lot by racism and being singled out in society. We single out teens because they dress different, have a different color of skin, a different religion, or no religion at all. Teens have a tough life these days. We have so much stress put upon our shoulders that some teens just can't take it and snap. We are stressed out everyday. We have so much to worry about, like being liked by other teens and fitting in with society. We are always worried about grades. Some teens get on the wrong track and get in with gangs. Maybe their family didn't support them but whatever the problem is that causes a teen to go over the edge, it needs to stop.

They only thing we can do to stop teen violence is to listen to the youth. Today's youth are trying to tell the world that they need help from society instead of being singled out. We as a society need to help the youth because we are the future. Therefore, instead of kicking teens out of school or throwing teens in jail, society needs to open its ears and hearts to us. I believe more and more ChalleNGe programs need to be introduced. Instead of having Alternative Ed schools let's open more ChalleNGe programs up to teens. Let's take care of today's teens even if we fail. We need to help each other be successful in life. If we don't take care of the youth, who will take care of the future?

Desiree Samson

Michigan ChalleNGe



Youth Violence Is All Around Us

Youth violence it's here, it's there, it's everywhere you look, but we are so blind to it. Why does it go unnoticed? Death of kids and teenagers are just forgotten or never even acknowledged. You see it in our eyes and we feel it in our hearts. I walk to the store and wonder if I'll even make it there. Will I be jumped, shot, or killed? Why? Is it because of the clothes on my back, the shoes on my feet, or just the colors I'm wearing?

Our hearts are crushed and our families torn apart, and why? All because no one believes blood is thicker than water. Snitches end up in ditches. Kids can't even attend school without knowing if they'll make it through the day. First it was high school, then middle school and junior high, but now what's worse, we can't even send our babies to school. We have children ages six and seven killing each other and then we ask what this world is coming to?

Drugs. We can't escape them. They're in the streets and in almost everyone you meet. Babies addicted to crack and little ones selling smack. Every corner has its own, but all they do is bicker, look, drive by, and then wonder why. No one stops to help or pick us up. They just keep on going and once again, we're left alone and forgotten about.

You wonder why it is we lie, cheat, and, steal. Some of us even kill! But "why" you ask yourself and others. It's because inside we're all crying, screaming, wishing, and dreaming that someone would help take us out the street game and life of crime. Not just for a day or two, but forever, never to let us return to life we once knew.

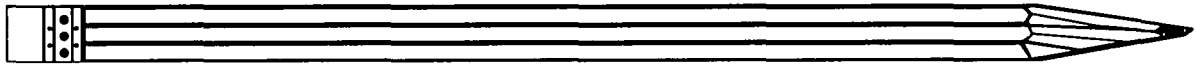
We scream for your help, but you do not hear us. We try to wave, but you cannot see us. We run for you, and you turn your backs and walk the other way. Then people say the reason he took his own life is because he wanted to die. However, do you ever stop to think why did they place that gun in his mouth and pull the trigger, or why did he take all those pills? Can't you look deeper than our thug appeal to see what it was that made us want to die? No, of course not, because we're all just animates to society.

Maybe we'll never know a new way of life, but I pray one day someone will not only open their eyes, but also their hearts and give a ghetto child like me a chance; a chance to change things for the rest of us.

You ask how can it change? We are your every tomorrow. Help us escape the past and not only live for today, but to strive for our goals in dreams that lie in tomorrow.

Herman Cohill

Michigan STARBASE



It Does Affect Me

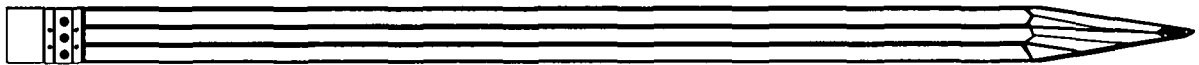
How has youth violence and drug abuse affected my life? When people do drugs, it makes me feel like I want to be a drug addict if I do drugs like them. It makes me sad to see someone doing drugs. It makes me sad because I don't want to see anyone get hurt or die over something stupid. Youth violence affected my life by seeing people going to jail or having to go to the hospital. Say, for example, when Kayla Rolland got shot at Buell. I felt unhappy when the little boy shot her. If someone brought a gun to my school, I would be scared to go back to school. It is horrible how kids fight today. Sometimes, when I go somewhere, I feel like I have to fight because other kids might pick on me, shove me, or shove me against something. Sometimes, I just want to run and tell an adult so this wouldn't happen. Sometimes, there is no reason for kids to act the way they do. That is how youth violence and drug abuse has affected my life.

What are the causes of youth violence and drug abuse? Youth violence and drug abuse start when kids come from a bad home or environment. When kids come from a bad environment, they get smart with other people; and that is how people get shot. We should feel embarrassed the way we talk to each other. Youth violence and drug abuse are caused by children not listening to their parents when they tell them to do something, especially when they ask them not to do something bad at school. Drug abuse is also caused by peer pressure. Peer pressure is when another kid tries to make you do something you don't want to do. Sometimes I wonder why kids do this stuff. How do you think parents feel when their kid is doing drugs? They feel bad because they don't have any control over their kids. Children think it is cool for them to do drugs because they see older kids doing drugs. Drugs don't make you cool. It turns you into something you don't want to be. Listen to your family and stay on the right track and don't use drugs.

What can I do about youth violence and drug abuse? We should talk to everyone we know who is doing drugs and tell them what it is doing to their bodies. I wish we could just burn all the drugs in the world. I think we need to take our time and explain what drugs can do to each of us. We can tell kids, if they do drugs, they will be in trouble with the police, not just with their parents. The police should get more involved with the kids to show them that they care instead of fussing at them all the time. We could scare kids by taking them to the jailhouse, the juvenile centers, or the funeral homes to show them what drugs really do. We should look forward to having a drug-free country. I'm getting tired of seeing drugs and hearing people talk about drugs. We need to see more police patrolling our neighborhoods. Drugs are taking control of kids and I'm getting mad. I'm mad because people are selling drugs to kids over and over again and not getting caught. We really need to think about what drugs are doing to our body. I don't know how to solve the problem but I can start by not doing drugs and saying no.

Kysia Harris

Michigan STARBASE



Where I Live

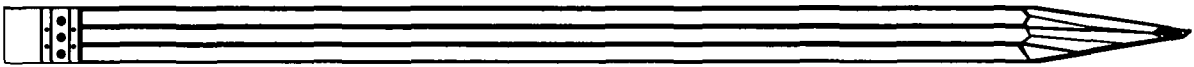
Many places where I live are unsafe. There is violence everywhere. There are drugs on nearly every street corner. I have watched many neighbors and their friends die from drugs and violence and it makes me very sad. Yesterday, as I walked to school, I saw a crack house busted by the police. I was very surprised to see that children lived in this drug house. Their parents were arrested and the children went to foster care. Many of the youth are involved in gangs at our area middle school. I really don't understand why they turn to drugs and guns after viewing the news and learning about how it has taken our young sisters and brothers to the graves. I guess one of the problems is peer pressure, media hype, and today's television programs. Negative music and movies send out the wrong message to the children sometimes. We have no respect for life and others anymore.

In Michigan, our school was saddened to learn about the shooting death of Kayla Rolland of Flint, Michigan. I really felt sorry for her family and schoolmates. The blame should be placed on the six-year-old boy's parents because they left the gun where he was able to reach it. The lack of parental involvement and topic discussions that address violence, drug abuse, and improper living conditions all contributed to Kayla's death.

My parents constantly remind me that violence is not the way we solve America's problems today. Instead, we need prayer in both our families and schools. Children should not be afraid to walk the streets where they live. It should be the responsibility of the entire community to help keep our schools and neighborhood safe. Children should be encouraged by their parents, teachers, community, and churches. They should be positive role models for children. The world would be a much better and safer place if every adult took the time out for one child.

Lamar Jones

Michigan STARBASE



I'd Rather

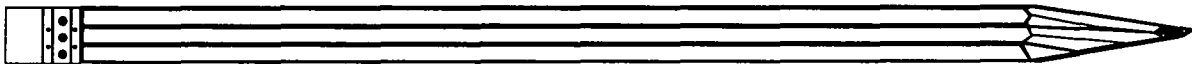
Youth violence and drugs today have really affected my life in a very negative way. People should not use drugs and, as stated on television, "drugs will fry your brain". Violence will hurt people or even kill someone. The cause of youth violence happens because friends say bad words to one another and the youth today have no respect for each other.

Often times, people result to drugs because they want to fit in with their peers. Peer pressure is the number one reason why youth result to drugs and violence. The word influence can either have a negative or positive effect on children today. Young people think that they need to fit in certain groups; therefore, the end result is drug abuse or gang violence. Peer pressure, divorce, and other problems cause drugs and violence among youth. If prayer were in our lives, it would help change the way we think about life. I could hang up signs that would remind us of what would happen if we use drugs or join gangs. Writing a letter to the United States President asking for public announcements would help remind students about drugs and violence. I wish that we would not do these things. Our age group is dying rapidly. If this epidemic doesn't soon come to an end, I am afraid we will lose our entire generation.

I'd rather swallow a bug than to do drugs.
I'd rather choke on a seed than to smoke weed.
I'd rather smell a mega rat than a cigarette.
I'd rather eat Pluto than smoke smelly tobacco.
I'd rather bite a candy cane than buy some cocaine.
I'd rather die on a hike than die on a pipe!

Eureka Leeper

Michigan STARBASE



How Crime and Drugs Affect My Life

Someone can buy drugs and die from drugs.

They can use them and abuse them.

People on the streets selling marijuana, crack, cocaine, and smack;

Why is there so much violence in my life?

The reason there is so much violence is because there are ignorant people in the world.

The drugs can kill your brain cells and take your life away.

I am happy that my mom and dad are in my life to do nice things with everyday.

In my class at school, we talked about drugs and violence and what to do if someone asked you to try drugs.

You are to say, "No!"

Drugs can lead you nowhere and your life will be gone, gone, gone;

Far from the love of home and your friends, and family won't see you.

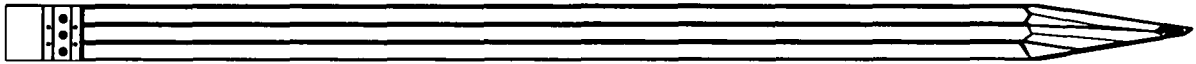
If you are on any type of drugs, please get some help before you get addicted.

Drugs aren't anything to play around with. They are serious things, and any type of drug will kill you.

So, whatever you do, please say "No to drugs". You need your family and friends to be by your side through thick and thin.

Brandon Long

Michigan STARBASE



My Opinion, My Understanding

Youth violence has an inward affect on me when I see others being hurt for reasons that a talk should have done the job. Youth violence is in the schools and has an impact on what is in the books and what you have to see day after day just to get an education. Kids get upset over very dumb issues and other kids work them up to harm other kids. I spend half my day in school with students who bring weapons to school without teachers, or security, or anyone but other kids knowing about it. Today, all, or most, kids' conversations are about fighting or some act of violence and abuse to someone. I try to be friendly with everyone at school, but you really have to watch in front and behind you because a fight can break out anytime, anywhere. School should have a special class for those who want to abuse themselves so they cannot have an affect on the others who are there to learn and move on to higher education. It takes action, not reaction after the facts.

TV also has too much violence. People are selling, using, or being arrested for drugs, so I watch a lot of cartoons. Drug usage is out of control today. Everyday, everywhere, you hear about someone using this, or kids calling other kids crack heads. You really don't understand what is happening to us inside that building (school) unless you are there, because students are hiding things from teachers and adults. Kids hang on the street corner right by the school and you know something is not right. You see smoke and backs turning to cars, hands in and out of pockets, and then they walk away. What book does the answer come from?

Some reasons for youth violence is no respect for others and all the negative talk and language that is heard all over school, homes, television, radio, church, and everywhere. Fights start because someone doesn't like someone else or the way someone looks, or talks, or anything. A lot is "he said, she said," so they will not be called names. They defend themselves with violence and are at the age where teachers won't listen, or say you are lying, or, "you are a big girl or boy, so you can handle the problem." "Tell your parents we are not your babysitters." When no one listens to you, that leaves few answers to the problem. Running might work today but, the next day, what are you going to do? We are left with a lot of questions that we should have help answering because we are still kids growing and learning. Too many other people are ready to get involved in a disagreement between two kids. Now older brothers, sisters, friends, relatives, and sometimes parents get involved but to hurt someone. Schools have to have a complete policy package that deals with what to do before and after a mishap, and they have to stick with it.

Drug abuse starts with peer pressure and ends with force. A whole group of kids gang up on one kid trying to persuade them to smoke something that only they know what it is. If and when they refuse, they are threatened and sometimes beat up. No one listens until it's too late.

I could stay away from violence and drugs but I have to go to school for my education and life, but I don't have to be one of them. I could talk to people that do drugs about the harm that it does to them, like having a long life to live in freedom without being arrested or killed because of drugs. I would ask youth to get involved in after school activities, church groups for their age, or something that takes up that time when there is nothing to do but hang out and let your mind get filled

with low life standards. There should be a teen center or kids center for teens that want to be free of drugs and its effects and still get their education. They need someone to talk to besides the drug dealers. Parents have to spend more time with the children, even watching television and the music they listen to. Also, it is confusing for children to see adults taking drugs for some illness that the doctor prescribed and they take, and take, and they tell you how it makes them feel. You hear that so much. It's in your head. You wonder why can't you feel the same way. Is that drug abuse?

Adults really have to watch what they say and do in our presence or when they think we are not watching, because it affects us. We all have to work together and communicate with one another to understand how the problem got this far, and why we did not see it sooner. Home and school have to work together. It should be mandatory that a parent has to come to the school at least once a month just to let the child know they care. If they can't come due to work, they should call and see what they can do to help the students in that school, not just their child.

There is a big need for a recreation center in communities where there is nothing to do but play, stand, and hang out in the streets, or load up at someone's house and do nothing but watch violent shows with bad language. In the summer, there should be a lot of things for youth to do: jobs, fun, and rewards. Schools need to recognize those who are doing fine with all that is going on around them. Look, listen, and learn what youth are trying to say in their actions.

Reuben Patton

Michigan STARBASE



Days Go By

Many people die while days go by.

You hit the needle then sleep a little. By and by while days go by,

You see many pills, guns, and knives by and by.

To hit the pipe on a bright night. You see a fight, someone dies. By and by while days go by.

I see a child with a doll. A car moves near. The child sees fear, the child is hit and they can't see.
He was on drugs, with some bud.

By and by while days go by, you see a fool who smells like a stool.

At night, the alarms go off. See a child on the ground. By and by while days go by.

I see a man with one hand. He uses a knife on this night to cut a guy for a hit.
To see the man on his death bed. By and by while days go by.

To see a 19-year-old child on the street. You see this guy on "News Bear" who says, "I'm 19, you can't tell me what to do."

I see pills on the floor, a voice saying, "Why?" "Why?" It's not your time.

The boy says, "I know, I just want to have fun." That dumb child.

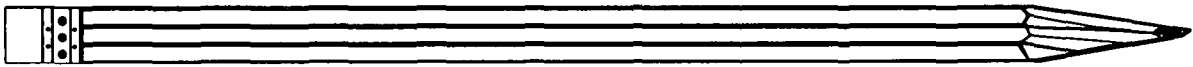
The days go by. The child dies and he sees his judgement. He asks God, "Why am I here?"

God answers, "You fool. I see a voice. You just rejoice. You hit the pipe on this night. You steal cars for a hit, so get thee hence."

By and by while days go by.

Kelly Godbold

Mississippi ChalleNGe



By Chance or By Choice

Youth violence has become a serious problem in our society. I foresee a greater expansion of the problem unless the youth begin to make wiser choices. I've experienced a lot of violence and drug abuse in my life. Being exposed to violent situations and drugs is not always a choice. Many are put into violent situations, but the way teenagers react to a violent environment is their choice. Many people use their experiences as an excuse for violent behavior. I see that as a cop-out.

Youth violence has directly affected my life. My grandparents, who were alcoholics, raised me. My family "smoked" and "snorted" in front of me. My mother and my aunts have served jail time.

I managed to keep myself out of trouble and away from drugs until trouble arose at my stepfather's home. I was removed from the premises and placed in the state's care.

I started out smoking cigarettes and shoplifting at age 13. My misbehavior continued to escalate. I skipped school to smoke, drink, have sex, and hang out with gang members. I was suspended from school once a week. I was using marijuana and drinking regularly. I was hospitalized for depression. My freshman year, I had almost stopped going to school. I was arrested for being a runaway and for disorderly conduct. I dated a guy for 5 years. He was 6 years older than me and had served 2 years in prison. I stayed with him for 5 years even though he continually hit me and dictated my every move. That's when I hit rock bottom. I got alcohol poisoning! I lost a friend to "huffing." These are some of my experiences and choices.

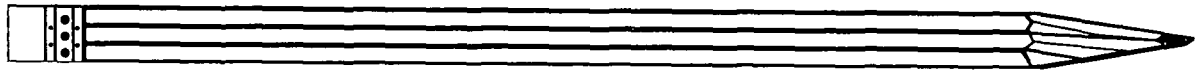
My opinion is that youth violence starts at home. Now, I'm not putting what a teenager does off on their parents. If a child comes from a broken home where parents can't peacefully coexist and tend to a child, that child is more likely to get in trouble and have bad relationships themselves. A child may get in trouble, just to lash out for attention from a parent. With no moral background, a child may not be able to distinguish reality from fairy-tale or right from wrong, causing them to act out what they have seen or heard. A child may experiment with drugs or even consider drug abuse as normal behavior if this was modeled at home. These are excuses teenagers will come up with, but it is their choice. I believe the cause of youth violence is teenagers making wrong choices.

What can I do about youth violence? I have to share my experiences with others. I know what worked and didn't work for me. I must tell others of my experiences, show them what I did to change, and what they can do to change. I must pray for them and teach them about the Lord. Most importantly, I can be a friend! I can let my peers know I care and accept them for who they are. I can help teach others good choices, so they can make greater achievements in life.

I'm 18 years old. I'm working toward my high school diploma and working for college scholarships. I've made the choice to turn my life around and do something positive. Now what about you? Youth violence has become a serious problem in our society. We must choose to participate in change so that change can occur.

Cleveland Tops

Mississippi ChalleNGe



Trapped in the Game

What can I do?
What can I do to get out the game?
Everyday I say I'm gonna stop
But I can't help the quick cash that I make off a rock
Tuesdays and Thursdays they sweep
But as soon as I see the blue and red lights
I'm quick on my feet
I'm known on the streets so now I have a street name

What can I do?
What can I do to get out the game?
My pockets are swollen from hundred dollar bills
Do I keep on or is this a sign to chill?
My parents don't know but they are starting to think
Asking me questions like do I sell, smoke, or drink
Nosey people are starting to hate saying that I deal
But to keep their mouth shut I slip them a hundred-dollar bill
Hanging out late becomes an everyday thing

What can I do?
What can I do to get out the game?
The block is hot and everyone is getting snatched
Bodies pop up because someone likes to rat
Momma is crying because her son is in jail
The bond is too high so she can't afford money for bail
I never thought a rock could make me go insane

What can I do?
What can I do to get out the game?
I see a pamphlet that reads Y.C.P.
Is this the way out?
June 17th - just wait and you'll see!

Jonathan Borisen

Missouri Challenge



Do the Write Thing Challenge

Violence and drugs have affected me. It has made me, and the people around me, who we are and the choices we make. It all started with the drinking for me. I drank not for the social aspect, but it was something that we grew up with along with marijuana.

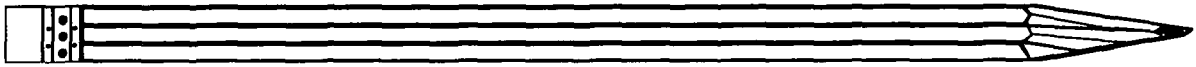
Marijuana is normality and a substance that is accepted by a culture that we represent. It is a lifestyle, a way of living. It does not seem wrong to us and is an everyday part of life and our belief of living life to the fullest. A phrase that we live by because you "live today and hope for tomorrow." This phrase represents my close peoples, my peers and me. I will continue to live life as I have believed and nothing is going to change that.

Violence is also part of our culture. It also ties in with drugs. The harder drugs (heroin, crack, PCP) cause people to come out of themselves and act for the drug, not their own mind. The personality of the individual drug will come out in the mind. Violence is also a sign of economic struggle. Some children must steal to eat or stay warm. It is the parent's fault for sending the children on the streets out of the home on their own with no skills. Another part to violence is the thrill of the crime for the participant. At a younger age it is vandalism. As they get older, vandalism is no fun or they learn their lesson. Then the crimes get more serious, and they do it for money and possessions. It's not a greedy thing at all times, but 99% of the time it is greed in the fullest (jealousy). It gets to the point in our brains where we do it so much that, even though it is a crime, we feel no remorse. In our minds, remorse if for the weak. We speak the truth when we speak to each other, but we play a different person for authority. We call these people "fake". People are sometimes fake to us, and they get dealt with in accordance to severity. The violence of murder may even come out of that situation. Love, loyalty, and respect are part of the rules. If these are broken there is often violence or a situation among people. Nowadays the violence is with many people. Even though it may only involve two individuals, their friends feel they have the responsibility to protect the person involved. Violence is a part of life. It is human nature to want all the things in this world you can possibly want. According to the law, violence and drug abuse is not acceptable. However, the people around us sometimes glorify violence. We must take it upon ourselves to try to stop it at a young age.

We can stop drug abuse and violence when we stop being jealous and wishing for a perfect world, which in reality will never happen. We can let the kids know at an early age that drugs destroy everything you will ever work for in your life. Let them know that drug abuse and violence will keep them from being successful in life, and tell them they have to change the way they view the world. We have to let them know they are the future generation, and help them take their future to the next level.

Susan Shelton

Missouri ChalleNGe



Life

On a cold winter day in February
February fourth to be exact
A baby was born at 10:22 a.m.
On a normal occasion this would have been a happy event.
But this baby did not have a family who wanted a baby heaven sent.

This poor fragile baby was a girl
Born addicted, life already a whirl.
What a path it would take, going in circles starting her first day.
Usually your first breathe,
Would be your hello to a loving family and world.
But for this tiny baby girl
It was her first test of survival and skill.

She would cry from the pains of withdrawl
Shaking with every tear
This baby already knowing the meaning of fear.
But the addictions will not be the last test for her in life,
Next was the abuse!
This little princess went home from the hospital
With a "family" who would rather be cut loose.

This baby's cries were not comforted; her needs not met
So tiny yet so strong she held it within.
She was stuck in a crib never held,
just left in bed
learning to deal with not being fed.

Then one day this little angel was taken away
The state decided that she could not live that way.
She was put up for adoption, like many of others
(did I mention she had three siblings same sad story?)

This infant now a toddler, after jumping around
Was finally given a good home,
With loving parents and her siblings

This toddler would grow through life to become a teen.
This teen who was once so fragile,
Was now herself very mean.

To her the world was her enemy.
She was headed down the dreaded path, same as those before her...
Dealing with gangs, sex, violence, and drugs,
She stayed away from few of these problems.
Although they affected her in some way,
Dealing with this "life" everyday.

She would go through Juvy, Behavioral Health Systems
All trying to work through the thick stems,
And find the root of the problem.

But she was not willing to let them in
Herself always involved in violence,
Her family having problems with drugs,
And those around her dealing with the pressures of sex.
Although all had different problems
Yet same as the rest.

Now this girl had managed to stay off drugs
And refrain from sex,
Didn't mean she had not been put to the test.
But as odd as it may seem
Violence can be just as addicting

Now she was really starting to fall,
But there were those who believed in her
And wanted her to overcome it all.

She would put forth the effort
But gain other things while getting better.
She would have an EDO,
And fight off depression.

Then she received a letter while in Juvy
And saw the bold writing of:
"her loved one dead!"
The obituary was also in the envelope,
Dead from a gang war
And addiction to dope.

So then it hit her, is it worth it all?
Always causing trouble,
And seeing friends fall from a brawl.
People she was with just months before,
now shot and lying on the floor.

With this in mind, she had to decide
That now she could no longer hide.
She'd have to be honest with herself
And change to better her ways.

She started participating in counseling
And working things out with her parents.
None of it was easy, but everyone stayed unmoving.

Everyone fought for her
And said their prayers,
For this girl who seemed so evil,
They knew was really feeble.

So finally after months of hard work
This girl crawled out of the dirt.
She saw hard work could pay off,
And there is more to life than just blowing things off.

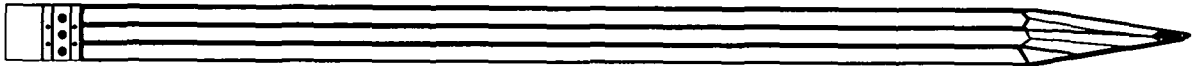
She had learned the meaning of Love, Trust, and Understanding.
And now is continued to be ever changing.
She had changed so much,
And shown others to learn how to trust.

Now I don't know if this meant anything to you,
But please think it over before you think life is through.
Realize to do things for yourself
Don't worry about others,
Understand we need to live life for ourselves
And not for those around us.

So I hope you've understood this girls story,
And will live life to its fullest Glory!

Abram Boise

Montana ChalleNGe



Quick With The Fists

"Go to hell!" Wham! A quick fist stopped that fat boy's blaring mouth. He stumbled back a few steps and cupped his hands under his nose and mouth trying to stop the blood that rushed out. "You jerk!" His face filled with rage and turned so red I could barely tell that his face was splattered and smeared with his own blood. I pounded my fist into his face with three painfully accurate and rigid blows. I didn't stop there. I just kept smashing my red clenched wads of hate and pride back into the boy's face. "YAAAGGHHHHH!" the boy screamed bloody murder as he felt his nose break and suddenly he jumped back and fell to the ground. It all happened at the same time that I heard that gut wrenching crunch from the hit that broke his nose. The shriek he let out was so piercing, that even in my blind rage I had to stop to cover my ears.

I stood towering over the pudgy eighth grader; I was only an eleven-year-old skinny blond-haired, blue-eyed boy. I held my lanky arms stiffly down and out to my sides with my fingers rolled tightly into bloody fists as I looked down at the boy. I was frustrated and confused; then suddenly I snapped out of my trance and realized that the entire playground had gathered around the fight. A few seconds before I had been pounding the daylight out of that taunting boy, my anger fueled heavily by the chants and screams of the other children and the thudding beat of my heart that I felt throughout my entire body.

"God, what had I done?" I thought to myself, but before I could find an answer, I was suddenly snatched up by the recess teacher and dragged off into the principal's office.

That was in the sixth grade, and I remember it vividly. I had fought and the teachers all told me I was wrong and I was disciplined for it. However, the discipline is not what I remembered. The result from the fight that I remembered most was the praise from the other students, my friends. The same cycle went on throughout grade school and on into high school. That cheering on and praise from my friends about my fighting started to create a habit that encouraged me to instigate fights over anything in high school. The pressure became even greater when I walked onto the varsity wrestling squad my freshman year. I loved wrestling because I was good. I could go and beat up some kid from a rival school, and when I won, everyone cheered.

Youth violence is fueled by many different causes such as popularity, contests, differences in ethnic backgrounds, drug use, or social grouping and division. The one thing that all these causes have in common is the competitive root of trying to be better than the next person. And in America, winning against the competition is a way of life. In a competitive situation, there is naturally the winner and the loser. This can result in harassment, mixed emotions, or stress, which can lead a youth to act out violently.

Youth today have a lot going on in their lives, physically and mentally, with schooling, social standings, their friends, family, or extracurricular activities. It all builds up stress in teenagers like steam in a boiling kettle. Youth need a relief valve of some sort, and a place or direction of movement for all the "steam" that they may have inside themselves. Acting out violently or fighting is all that emotional and physical stress being vented in the wrong way. If teenagers could learn to take that

compacted energy and channel it into something positive, the youth violence of today's youth would likely decrease.

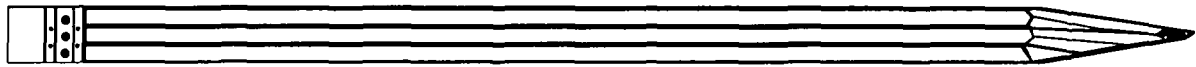
I am a living example of someone who learned how to channel that explosive energy into something productive. I took up writing and painting to help vent a great deal of my emotions. I started snowboarding, went camping and hiking, and learned how to fish, as well as many other physical activities that helped me to use my energy in a positive manner.

I want to help other teens that may have anger problems. I would like to help guide them in making the right decisions where I had made the wrong choices. I know that if I could speak to kids, I could show them how to manage their aggressions. I have started to change the trend of youth violence by changing myself. That way, others can see how I deal with the same feelings or pressures that they do. I could be a peer counselor.

Youth violence is a big issue, and it decreases with one person at a time, and I have started with myself. The journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step.

Barbara Jean Hoskinson

Montana ChalleNGe



Violence in My Life

As a public school student in a community full of racial controversy between Native Americans and whites, youth violence was a large part of my every day life. I was a white girl in a Native American community and I was often singled out and called on to fight every other day. Youth in this area frequently enjoyed vandalizing public property as a sport. The cause of this violence usually stemmed from cultural and moral differences or simple boredom.

I also have vague memories of the violence I was exposed to by my father as a small child. That type of violence was brought on because he was a diabetic who refused to take care of his illness. He became mentally intolerable to the point of standing in court facing domestic violence charges filed by my mother. These charges resulted in his moving out of state and out of my life forever. In this case the violence was eliminated by the legal system. But in school I usually just made it worse for myself when I tried to make a difference by speaking out. Without the help of school staff or local law enforcement, eventually I was pushed to the point of giving up and moving away, due to constant harassment and dissatisfaction.

Do you ever wonder what life would be like if you had never encountered any youth violence? In my own opinion life would be perfect, which isn't possible. The violence I have dealt with has taught me to be strong and slow to judge. I am willing to accept it as a learning experience rather than bad luck.

But of course there are many youth in the world that have been through far more than I. These youth may not agree with my point of view, but I wouldn't have felt this way two years ago, either. I used to be so full of anger and resentment that I couldn't find it in my heart to leave the fighting in my past. But once I did, I learned from it and forgave my offenders. Everything happens for a purpose; no matter how terrible an experience may be there is always good to be obtained. Through every hardship wisdom and strength grow and once a person learns this, life becomes more beautiful.

Many of the vandals and troublemakers in my community grew up in a corrupt home. I believe violence can be passed on through learned behaviors. My father grew up in an abusive home; so did his father and so did I. When a child is abused or neglected in some way, good examples are not set. Usually deep in the heart of the youth, this is known and anger is created. This anger grows like a fungus and spreads. Sometimes the child will gain a low-self esteem and put little effort into all he would truly like to accomplish. This youth often grows vulnerable to drug and alcohol use, and often hangs with friends who do the same things and have the same type of anger.

I also grew up in a corrupt home; my father left when I was a small child and my mother raised my five siblings and me alone. She was always at work during the day and often at the bars at night. With her out most of the time, how were good examples supposed to be set for me? I was certain of my mother's love but unsure of whom I was deep down. I became a victim of abuse while my mother was gone. I developed a dangerous anger that channeled resentment toward my mother because she was not there for me.

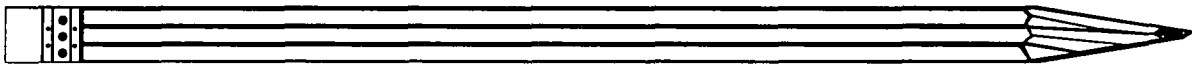
Violence in the life of a child or young adult is devastating to the self-esteem of that person. Drugs and booze may release him from the reality he knows, but it will also drag down his drive for life that should naturally exist. Peers who are headed down the same self-destructive path will only encourage him to continue the same life style. Because he sees his friends living the same way of life, he doesn't recognize the wrong in it.

A youth needs assurance of self worth and the best source of that is family. In a corrupt family the fungus that grows with the anger of neglect can cause a child to commit outrageous acts of violence to attract attention. Police forces in various communities react differently to these outbursts. Crimes such as vandalism, domestic violence, or drug and alcohol abuse can be taken too heavily or too lightly. Unfortunately in my hometown it was often taken too lightly. Things of this nature should always be taken very seriously.

There is a need for stronger family ties, consistent fair law enforcement, positive role models, and healing of racial and ethnic conflicts. In families children require far more attention than is usually given. The only resolution to this would be for one family at a time across the country to make the difference. The average American family places the attainment of money and time spent at work as top priorities. The most important thing should be the well being of the child. With this positive attention, youth would not search out other ways of feeling accepted, such as drug abuse and violence.

Jeffrey Kaiser

New Jersey ChalleNGe



How Youth Violence Has Affected My Life

Youth violence has affected my life in many ways. Following are some of the effects youth violence has had on me, some causes contributing to violent acts, and some things I can do to stop the violence.

Youth violence has affected my life and the lives of people around me in all sorts of ways. By affecting me personally, it has made me have a negative attitude. From being around youth violence, it seems to make me violent towards not only my family, but also friends and close loved ones as well. By being violent to those closest to me, I have hurt them somehow by lying, stealing or taking advantage of them in other ways. I have never gone to the extreme of physically harming people close to me. Furthermore, from being around youth violence, it has led me to believe that it is right and ok and that violence is the only way to handle and settle problems and situations in the world today.

In today's society there are many causes for violence among the youth of the world. A big contributor towards violence amongst youth is the media. The media is one of the biggest reasons for youth violence. There is too much violence shown on the news and in music videos. Additionally, whether rock or rap, there is too much vulgar language and negative subliminal messaging in today's music.

Another big reason for violence is video games. Video games display fighting and beating of people leading to death in these games. Many are all about brutality, gore, blood, and killing.

Role models, also, play an important role in youth violence whether they believe it or not. The youth of the world look up to people whether they are big music stars or sports stars. If youth see or hear about their role model performing a violent act, they will get the wrong idea, think it is ok, and do it.

People having simple arguments over silly things start fights without thinking things through and failing to consider the consequences. Most of the time little quarrels happen because people have short tempers and don't know how to control their emotions.

One of the greatest causes of youth violence is gangs. Gangs promote violence fully. They suck youth in through many different ways. They offer them a "family", protection, friendship, and money. Additionally, gangs offer youth access to drugs and alcohol. Both of these things impact your judgement and lead to violent acts.

There are many things I can do about youth violence in today's messed up and vile world we call society. To stop myself from falling victim to youth violence, I can change my attitudes and actions towards others. I can learn how to control my temper better and assert myself better in tough situations. Breaking up fights and even stopping fights before they happen can help me stop youth violence. Letting people know the negative results that come out of fighting and other acts of violence can help youths get along with each other better. Also, I can tell people to just calm

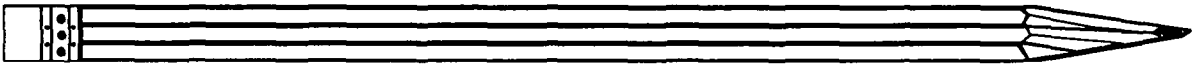
down and talk things out before they do anything violent. I can tell people that violence isn't the answer and doesn't solve anything.

Just by doing simple things like telling people to find role models who aren't violent or promote violence. And by encouraging youth to listen to non-violent music and watch non-violent television programs can make a difference.

There are so many things in this world that are corrupt and overrun by violence today that it leads youth to believe that the violent way is the right way. The youth of our society must lead others away from a violent lifestyle.

Sonia Pereira

New Jersey ChalleNGe



Violence Amongst Us

Youth violence has affected my life in many different ways. One of the ways it affected my life was in school. When I first started school, I was nothing but a nerd. I often saw kids with guns and knives fighting after school. Everybody in school respected them; everybody was afraid of them. So I started to hang out with them.

Yes, I carried a gun and a knife, always having the cube in the back pocket. People started to respect me. They were scared of me and I was so proud of myself. (How stupid I was.) Many people I hung out with got hurt or were killed, but I didn't care, until Luis died. I was right there when it happened two years ago, but I still remember. I was breathing so hard as I ran and ran like never before. I cried so much like never before. I put the gun, the knife and the cube away and since then I have never used violence towards anyone.

Some causes of youth violence are low self-esteem, violence in the home and drug and alcohol abuse. My low self-esteem contributed to my seeking respect resulting in my using violence to frighten people.

Frequently, when kids grow up in a violent atmosphere, they resort to violent behavior in their future relationships. Also, if older siblings display violent behavior, the younger ones might follow in their footsteps.

Many teenagers are under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs, both of which can result in their using violence without even being aware of their actions. I do not feel that I have the power to change other kids behavior. However, if we had more open doors and people in whom we could trust and talk to, maybe this youth violence would stop.

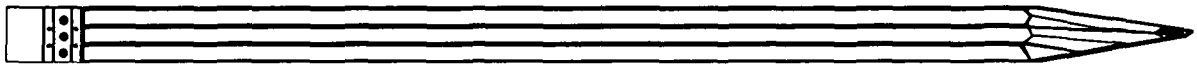
Here is a poem I wrote in dedication to Luis.

Luis I Love You

I saw him there, eyes wide open
Blood dripping out of his mouth
His left hand moved once, twice, and no more.
I closed his eyes and kissed him.
Then I ran, I ran faster than ever.
I was scared; I was breathing hard.
I cried, I cried like never before
But I did put the gun, the knife and the cubes away.
Since that day, I never touched them ever again.

Abraham Cho

New York ChalleNGe



The Allegory of the Youthful Appeal Toward Violence

Youth violence profoundly affects what society sees and does, and dictates the manner in which they live their daily life. Personally, it has hindered my ability to feel safe and free. It has shaped the way I behave today. Society as a whole can preemptively stop youth violence before it starts.

Youth violence influences the very manner in which people live life. Gangs and violence go hand in hand. Most people think of gangs as inner city, African American teenagers. Asian gangs are very different from any other gang. The hierarchy demands the utmost respect for one's elders. You were required to bow your head in the presence of an older "brother," failure to do so would result in physical punishment. I vicariously experienced violence through my friends who were in a gang. You could be standing next to one of your friends and a second later he could be shot. It seemed so unreal. Honor, respect, nobility, these were things we fought for; yet none of us truly understood what they meant. I couldn't escape it, I felt trapped because if your "brother" fought, then you were obligated to fight beside him. Failure to do so was unheard of. You had to constantly look behind your back because you never knew what day would be your last or your friend's last. Honor is a way of life, not a rationalization for violence. Regardless of race, age, religion, or culture, violence is universal; it will poison everyone and everything it touches.

There are many subtle and conspicuous causes which all culminate to engender youth violence. Generally speaking, violence is directly correlated with the cognitive condition of the violent individual performing the violent act. Anger, malevolence, and an unstable social condition may all contribute to the violent actions of that individual and these ideas disseminate. Thus you have the creation of gangs and other "specialized cliques" which geometrically increase the amount of violent acts being committed. During the first twelve years of human psychological development, we are most susceptible and impressionable to outside factors. For instance, if a child was constantly exposed to violence and great affliction throughout their early adolescence, he is more likely to become a violent teenager. Kids grow up with a lack of understanding that life is transient. Teenagers who commit youth violence may have the mentality that drugs, sex, and money are the only things important in life and they will do anything to achieve them. We, as a society, must stop violence and revert these grave misdoing.

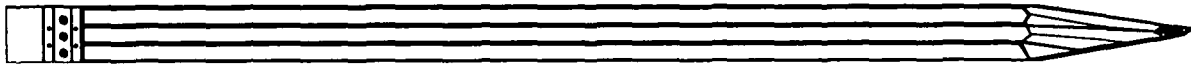
Only by carefully assessing youth violence problems can society successfully remove them. I propose forming, government sponsored, programs which systematically evaluate common problems in specific neighborhoods. They would then train youth on anger management and how to peaceably deal with life. The subtle changes in one's life demeanor may be indicative of major changes in that person's life as well as a disposition toward violence to temporarily alleviate these problems. These programs are specifically designed to pick up the changes in a specific person and help him or her deal with those problems in a productive manner.

Life's too short to be violent and angry all the time. Gangs and violence are futile and just destroy youth. Teenagers die everyday because of gang related violence. All this youthful hate and violence is for no real reason. As Abraham Lincoln so eloquently put it, "We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it, it must not break our

bonds of affection. The mystic cords of memory will swell when again touched as surely they will be by the better angels of our nature."

Emilie Stein

New York ChalleNGe



Youth Violence

Youth violence is an expanding obstacle in this day and age. Teens are committing such violent crimes as robbery, assault, and murder. There are various things that can cause youth violence. There are many things that can be done in an effort to stop these problems. Correspondingly, juvenile disorder has affected my life immensely. To commence my essay, I will discuss the causes of youth violence.

There are numerous causes for adolescent disturbances. I feel the media encourages violence. For example, during a movie when stars partake in a potent, violent scene they are illustrated as heroes. Younger, more affected and naive people are more inclined to take this as a positive action and attempt to mimic their so-called heroes. Society also contributes to violence in teens, by its scantiness of quintessential morals and ethics, leaving kids without an evident differentiation amid right and wrong. In addition, an unstable family entourage can cause youths to lash out violently. If a child is brought up in a habitation where domestic and marital physical abuse as well as verbal and psychological abuse takes place then the probability of them leading violent lives are far greater. The violent nature they are so used to will wear off on them to the point that they perceive their actions as a "normal" way of life. As they grow older and start their own family they will then project their violent nature onto their loved ones, thereby perpetuating the cycle of violence itself.

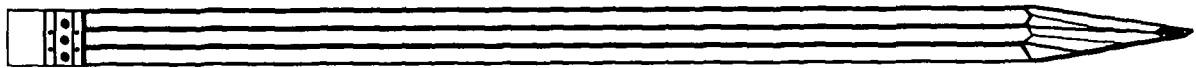
There are many things that can be done in an effort to stop youth violence. One thing I can do is to make people aware of these violent problems. By doing so, people could distinguish this imperative issue and try to rectify it as they see fit. Society could implement peer mediation groups, structured after school activities and/or provide adequate childcare for after school hours. Furthermore, I could enlighten others and myself about youth violence. If I did this people would have some evidence as to who, where, what and why they are dealing with youth problems in today's society. Accompanied by this knowledge society could strive to pinpoint where the problem stems from and how to correct it. One more thing that could be done is the availability of youth counseling. If young people were given someone to talk to this could help them alleviate affliction and manage their anger by means other than violent crime.

Pubescent brutality has affected my life severely. It has made me aware of the society in which I've grown up. I am alert and attentive to the social issues concerning youth violence. Also it has been a helpful indicator on what to do and what not to do. From observing youth that commit these violent acts and noting their consequences and current mental state, I've come to the conclusion that these acts are ones I would never want incorporated in my life. Finally youth violence has affected me by making me want to help. I feel it is my obligation to make an attempt to change this current situation. Seeing those who are making poor and unwise decisions about their lives almost forces me to want to reach out and lead them the right way.

In recapitulation, youth violence is a multiplying problem that behooves instantaneous concentration. Notwithstanding the abundant causes, there are many things that can be done in an effort to resolve this promulgation. I say this because this issue has impacted my life extensively. I feel confident a resolution to this problem will be discovered as long as sincere and bona fide efforts and contributions are put forth.

Jason Ramage

North Carolina ChalleNGe



Stop the Violence

What is youth violence? Youth violence is a terrible thing; it's a killer. Youth violence has affected my life dramatically. I know because I got caught up in it. I did the drugs and hung out on the block with the boys. I would hurt people for fun and rob stores to get money. (The love of money is the root of all evil.) I did it because I thought it was cool, and that's what a lot of teenagers want, to be cool and accepted in some kind of way. To achieve this, they oftentimes resort to violence or join gangs where they learn another type of violence.

I know this because I was in a gang. I learned the hard way that gangs are nothing but a bunch of ruthless thugs looking for a fight. Gangs are a major factor in contributing to the violence in today's society.

Another reason for the violence today, is kids growing up in homes with no concerned parents or role models. There is often no one available to teach children right from wrong.

Also, I think youth resort to violence because they want to be cool or get attention from someone. They often think that if they do some kind of violent thing people will notice them and pay attention to them. It doesn't matter where that attention comes from. It could be from a gang member, newspaper article or anyone willing to recognize and pay attention to them.

Drug abuse also plays a major role in youth violence. There are so many different kinds of drugs that can mess with kids' heads and cause a lot of young people to do all types of violent acts. Alcohol, along with drugs, plays a role in youth violence because a lot of teens are drinking and they don't know when to stop. They often go off into a violent rage and do things they wouldn't do if they weren't under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

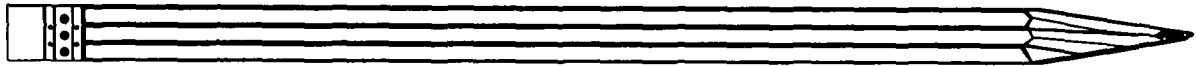
What can I do about youth violence? There are many things that I want to do to stop the youth violence in the world today. First, I want to start a non-violence organization to help troubled teens get their lives together just like I was able to do through a church program. I would like to open a center for teens to come to hang out instead of hanging out on the streets where there is a lot of crime. They can come in and be accepted without having to be initiated in like they would have to do if they joined a gang.

I would also like to become a peer mediator in my community and help kids my age handle their conflicts without resulting to violence. I also want to become a speaker instructing youth on how I took the hard road of living the life of violence, how bad it affected my life, and how I changed my life around through the help of Jesus Christ and how he can help them.

We must put an end to the violence before it overtakes our youth. I am going to make it my mission to share my experience and try to make a difference in the lives of the youth I meet.

Heather Ray

North Carolina ChalleNGe



Youth Violence

Youth violence and drug abuse is a plague we deal with and face everyday. Children as young as six years old are killing each other, teens are strung out on drugs, gang rivalries are claiming the lives of our youth, parents are abusing children in their homes. High school, middle school and elementary school students are bringing guns to school and killing classmates.

Because of all of the violence and drug abuse, my life is harder to deal with. I'm scared to go into certain parts of town because of the drug dealers and gang members that hang around there. I don't like to go anywhere alone because I never know what is going to happen. Also, reading newspaper articles about violent crimes and people arrested for selling and using drugs makes the world seem like a scary and dangerous place. It saddens me to think that people are becoming so cruel and heartless.

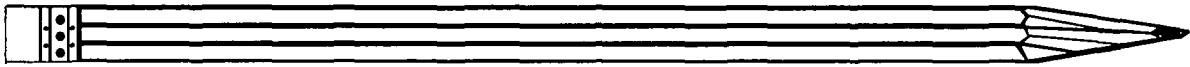
There are many causes for violence and drug abuse among youth. Some of these causes are stress, broken homes, violence in the home and poor examples set forth by uncaring parents. I'm not saying it's okay to go out and kill someone and blame it on a movie or stress from school or work. But the violence children see will affect them in one way or another. Teens under stress often try to find an escape and end up turning to drugs to make themselves feel better. Children from broken homes may feel pain and hurt and turn those feelings into anger. Violence in the home effects the child in that home. If a little boy sees a man hit a woman, he is likely to adopt that same behavior.

To help prevent violence and drug abuse a few possible solutions are possible. I think establishing stress management classes in schools to help educate young people about stress and alternatives to handling that stress would help eliminate some of the violence. Also, if parents would set better examples by not letting young children see inappropriate behavior from them, then children would have better role models to emulate. Lastly and most importantly, parents need to take responsibility for what their children are doing. Instead of blaming violence and drug abuse on peer pressure, parents should think about the examples they are setting and take responsibility for their actions. After all, they have to practice what they preach; let kids learn something good from home so they can pass on the lessons and make this world a better and safer environment for all of us to live in.

We are told that we are the future or as some people say we are Generation X. But is it the truth? We as teenagers are faced with many challenges that we are unable to solve, but we are expected to meet the challenge of the future. If we are expected to meet these challenges, we need to start now. Adults have been our role models for centuries and I believe that if adults and teenagers work together we can find a solution. So the question is "what can be done now to stop the violence."

Lindsey Cates

Oklahoma ChalleNGe



Monkey See - Monkey Do

Violence is everywhere and should never be the answer to anyone's problems. There are some simple exercises we all can do to control our anger. If people would only set positive examples for those closest to them, children would learn how to do the right thing and they would continue to do the same things for their children, and their children's children. It should become a never-ending cycle.

Picture a five-year-old child where violence was constantly present in the home. She lived in a little two-bedroom house with her mom, dad, and older sister. She started noticing that Mom and Dad were beginning to fight frequently over simple things.

One night she was lying in bed listening to her mom and dad scream at each other about how no good and worthless they were. She heard things slam on the floor, and heard footsteps coming down the hallway. She rose quickly to peek out through the crack of her door to see what was going on. She saw her dad slam the folding laundry room doors, intentionally planning to shatter her mom's arm. She crawled back into bed, scared. As her dad left, she listened to her mom cry and ask God why this was happening.

The fighting occurred night after night. One night she heard her mom tell her dad that she was going to leave him. Dad threatened she would regret it if she ever tried to leave. The rest of the night, her mom slept in fear for her life. After all that happened, things never got better; they just went downhill, and never improved for the girl who is older now.

We know that there are children all over the world who grow up in homes like these. Because I have seen others in similar situations, violence has truly made me a different person today. All violence does is hurt people. It has hurt me so much throughout my life that I'm terrified to even think about what could happen in my future.

I believe people should think before they act. Like some people say, "Monkey see - monkey do." Some children see their friends and families drinking, doing drugs, and hurting each other, therefore the children think that it is okay to do the same things that their parents did. If the five-year-old girl's father had never been drinking on those occasions, perhaps her life would not have turned out the way it did.

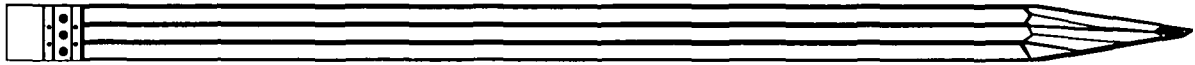
All we can do about violence is help people learn to control their tempers. I have been in an anger-management class here at Thunderbird Academy, and I know that it works. There are lots of programs like anger-control, even in small towns; people can go to different agencies for help. We can also encourage others to count to ten when they get angry before letting the anger burst out of control. We must constantly remind everyone, everywhere, that violence is not the answer.

I believe that if everyone who cares about their families would set positive examples, their children would learn early how to do the right thing. As they grow up, they would know how to act with their children and teach them how to act responsibly. Children watch their parents and see both

the good and bad things and what the parents are doing reflects on their children. "Monkey see-monkey do."

Chris Lowry

Oregon ChalleNGe



Violence

In the 1960's, cheating and talking in class were the problems addressed. Today, rape and murder are the norm.

By definition, violence means an action or actions by one or more persons that could or does threaten the safety or well being of an individual or individuals.

I first came in contact with actual violence when I was extremely young by means of television. Back then, television didn't have many displays of violence as it does today, however, that is not what the problem is. The problem is how people perceive and resort to what they see.

Some of the most popular movies out right now are *The Fight Club* and *The Matrix*. Both emphasize violence as necessary to either protect one's own self or to get the job done. This idea is unwise.

When people, particularly teens, view violence either on television, in the movies or on the streets, some laugh at it, think it's cool or want to do it as well. What about violence in the home, or violence between children and parents, or siblings vs. siblings; how do we account for their behavior?

For some of the violence discovered in the home, the reason for its occurrence is stress. Stresses resulting from the job or peer pressure on you to do something you know is wrong or something you just don't want to do, is an every day happening. Sometimes, violence between parent and child is a result of household stress. The parent is all stressed out and needs to vent. Most of the time this is exercised by the physical injury of others, even one's own self.

When the child is a victim in this matter, he or she may feel angry inside and that makes him or her vent. Some turn to drugs to find the quickest way to get the anger out of his or her mind. Some turn inward to release their physical or emotional pain and scars, putting it away, ignoring it. This is dangerous.

There are many reasons why violence occurs. Some of the prime examples have taken place in our very schools. Kids or teens, who have been teased or just don't fit in, have gone to school with firearms saying to themselves, "I'll get even!" This single thought has turned honor roll students into inmates... for life.

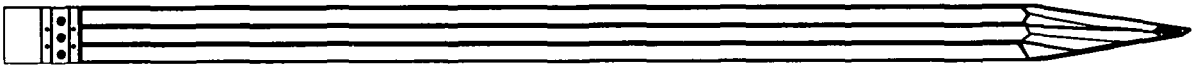
There are many things people can do to change or avoid violence, even confrontation. First, identify the actual problem. Second, find the causes and effects of the problem. Third, identify possible reactions to the problems from those around or involved with the problem. Fourth, think of possible ways to work the problem out until a solution has been identified. Fifth, put your thoughts and ideas into action. You'll feel much better when you find yourself in control of a win-win situation. There is no reason why violence has to happen at all.

There are always the ever-present anger management classes, which can help your anger dissipate. They give you options to channel your anger in more productive ways like exercising, running, or hitting a punching bag. These ways, when practiced, will not injure others or ones own self. Why use all of that energy to make someone else miserable? Try playing a game, or try to sleep. You might try to listen to soft music. There are many ways to relax.

In closing, I'd just like to say that violence is not the way to release stress, fear or anger. Use what you have to help the situation and better yourself and those around you. You'll find out it is a much better and a much more satisfying way of practicing self-control. Think before you act. Think of how your actions will effect the people around you and your life as well.

Ira Wagner

Oregon ChalleNGe



Violence and Alcohol

Most people have seen some kind of violence throughout their lives. It could be on the streets, at school, or even at home. People who are around violence are affected by it every day. I grew up in a violent home and it has effected me.

I grew up in Moscow, Russia. In my family, we had five kids and I'm the third oldest child. My parents are alcoholics. My mother was never violent so she could not stand up for herself at any time of her marriage to my dad. My father was extremely violent and at one point he killed a neighbor who was also my friend. Alcohol was a big thing in Russia and still is. In my family, it was all that my parents depended on. I took the responsibility of raising my little sister and brother at age nine. I never had time to be a kid. My older brother and I were trying to run the house on our own. My brother and I also ran away from home many times because we were beaten almost half to death or threatened to be killed by our father.

We didn't have anyone to turn to in our neighborhood because it was full of people who were drug users in some way or another. I saved my food for my little brother and sister and went hungry all day. If I was desperate enough for food -- I had to eat out of the trash cans on the streets.

After living like that for almost ten years of my life, I ran away one last time and got very lucky. I was finally placed in an orphanage. Even though I was in a safe and secure place, I still saw a lot of violence from staff. Staff didn't beat us half to death but they did hurt us physically and verbally.

My sister and I were then adopted at age seven and twelve by an American family. After a year of living with that family, my sister was separated from me because my adopted parents didn't like her. She was abused verbally and mentally. I've always kept her safe from violence, but in that family I could not because my mother had complete control over me. I could not make any decisions without permission and in a year I was in the same position as my sister. I got out, but it took a long time and a lot of courage.

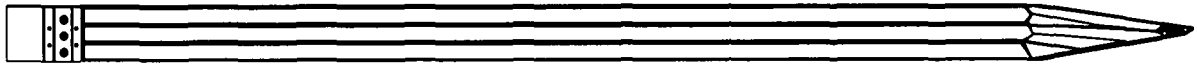
I was placed in foster care at age sixteen. That same year I started high school. That's when I first saw most of the teens that are involved in gangs, alcohol, drugs, and other things. I could not believe how much fighting I saw over the most horrible things.

After three weeks into the school year, I was pressured to use drugs, to get into gangs, and most of all sex. I know friends that are scared to wear any type of dress because of rape. It also included me. I went out with three guys. Two of them pressured me for sex and drugs and the other one almost raped me. That is part of the reason I came to the ChalleNGe program.

I came here to get away from problems at school and learn some skills I could use to be safe out in the real world. I also need some discipline because I'm going into the Army National Guard after this. This program helps me a great deal with my anger and respect. I hope that each and every one of the Cadets will learn what I've learned through the ChalleNGe.

Luis Alvarado

Puerto Rico ChalleNGe



Youth Violence in My Life

Violence is a beast, a shadow that lurks within the hearts of most of our youth. It's an infectious way of thinking that could be transmitted verbally to affect one's inner self-mind, soul and feelings or physically to affect the external part of oneself image. But I know that not all of us let the beast within overcome us. There are those strong and valiant enough to tame the beast within, shed some light in their inner shadow and by this I know that someday youth violence will be reduced to it's minimum.

Since I was just a young boy, I have suffered and witnessed many violent acts. As I'm writing, I'm having bitter memories of those I hurt and those who hurt me. I ask myself mentally with a tear forming in my eyes, was all that necessary? When I was about thirteen years old, I got into an argument in class. I was so wrapped up in the argument that I didn't even stop to think about talking it over in a more civilized way before I threw the first punch. The outcome of that conflict was a week of suspension a black eye and a busted lip. I was supposed to learn something from the experience, not to let my feelings take over my actions, but I didn't. The next day I started to take karate lessons and what I obtained from it I used it in a negative way. By the time I reached the tenth grade I would pick fights at least three times a week. I didn't care if I won or lost it was all about releasing all the oppressed anger gained by daily problems, but now I know I was just losing because violence was the only solution I had or at least thought I did.

The main reason for youth violence is closely related to the family values and the morals that are imposed since childhood. My father left home since I was very young, I barely remember his face. My mother was a great role model and she loved me very much. After a couple of years, she met someone special and I was forced to have a stepfather. The new member of the family made me realize that a new life was just beginning. As the years went by, I felt that my mother stopped loving me, but I understand that was my perception at that time. The feeling of being left out grew even more when my two little brothers were born. I started to hang out in places where I knew I was not supposed to hang out, and this led to the use and abuse of drugs and alcohol. After several years I realized that wasn't the way of dealing with my problems and I started taking advice. I listened to a friend of the family, SGT Melton, and she told me to clean up so I can join the ChalleNGe program, so I did. I have never felt healthier and motivated in my whole life as I feel now. I have changed my feelings about my family and the way I solve my problems.

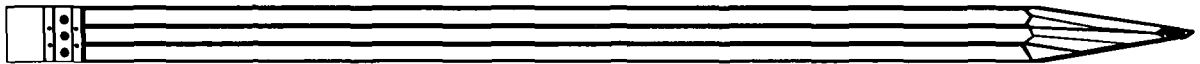
There are two things I considered very important when I think about helping young people like me. One of them is to give them advice on how to solve their problems without the use of violence. I would tell them that violence leads to violence and that a negative plus a negative will give you a negative. Thus the solution would not be found.

Another thing would be to motivate those who think that violence is the solution for their problems, to enter programs that are specialized in areas such as discipline, respect, leadership, responsibility and creating character. One of those places that are specialized in discipline and self-motivation is the ChalleNGe program from the National Guard. A program so advanced in its ways of teaching youth and how in such a little time it can actually make a change in a youth life.

In conclusion youth violence can be conquered, it's just a question of opening our minds and thinking things over before acting on emotion. It is better to admit your wrongs than to be a coward and use violence. It's better to have a friend than an enemy. I specifically mentioned the Challenge program as a way to help youth. Before I entered the ChalleNGe program, I was a wreck, I wasn't just a regular drop out. I suffered what I called an imbalanced disease. If I didn't smoke too much, I would drink too much and vice versa. By the time I reached my teen years, I lost a lot of love and respect for my mother. I couldn't even hug and kiss her without feeling strange. In the ChalleNGe program, I have realized how blind I was. I know now, how much I love her and every time I get a pass to go home, I get very excited, because I'm going to see the most beautiful person in my life, my mother. I owe all that positive thinking to a special program called ChalleNGe.

Richard Martinez

Puerto Rico STARBASE



Juvenile Violence

In Roberto Clemente School one day during the morning, it was 8:10am, and three kids did not let me in and bothered me. I was afraid about what they can do to me, so when the bell rang I didn't dare to come out. What was my surprise when I saw my two little brothers waiting for me. I needed them, I needed them because in the front gate of the school there were like 15 or 20 kids waiting for me to beat me, and they did. They hurt me so much that I wasn't able to walk, and of course I didn't want to go to school again. Emotionally I wasn't able to go to school. And I didn't want to. I was really scared.

Those kids came from a different social background; where they live, shotguns, drugs and fights were their living day. I think that the violence they learned was because that was the way they were used to living. My mom made a complaint to the police and visited their parents, but nothing happened. They just don't care about what their kids do outside their homes. My mom changed us to a new school. At the beginning I was almost in shock. I was very afraid about what can happen and I was wondering if it can happen again, but thank God it didn't. It was hard but I made it, now I feel so secure and made a lot of new friends and have better grades.

When I read this topic, I remembered all that I had to go through. Youth violence is a big problem in our society. The relation between parents and sons is awful; there's no communication; parents don't care what their kids do, and that's why the kids behave that way. In a certain way the kids don't have all blame. They don't receive love and respect, what can we expect? There are so many reasons for that, for example:

- a. Bad communication between parents and kids.
- b. Parents abusing their kids.
- c. Absence of real values.
- d. Absence of love.
- e. Bad influences of friends.

I thought that if parents change that lifestyle a lot of things could change. Our society has to change, and in many ways it's our duty.

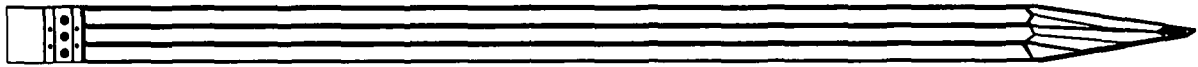
Parents need to change and learn not to be violent because sometimes that's why the parents act like that. For example, if you are an abused child, you'll probably be an abusive parent. The society has to improve our values and our goals to help create better human being. I think that I can contribute to be a role model to my friends, giving them good advices like staying in school, and don't doing drugs. There are so many programs that can help us like:

- a. The Boy Scouts
- b. Police league
- c. Sport teams
- d. Church

These are groups that promote good attitudes and the development of good and real values. So in that way we can avoid violence in our society

Maritza Melendez

Puerto Rico STARBASE



Violence

There is so much to tell, but no one seems to care. Maybe its because we get used to it. If we do not know about it, we could not care for it, but all the media has been telling us about it all the time.

Probably the media is responsible for most of the violence presented in our society. If we observe the conduct of children after watching cartoons, like the Pokemon cartoons, we could notice their aggressive behavior, jumping all around and hitting others while fighting for the main role in their Pokemon story. If we think for a moment about the conduct of these children after watching a cartoon, what can happen to adults after watching a Jean Claude Van Damme movie? Maybe the adults feel that they can provide pain without obtaining any response but the reality is that the response is reflected in every person that is affected by others, no matter their ethnical precedence or cultural background.

Every person can be a receiver of all kinds of messages no matter if they are physical or mental messages. These messages have different influences in people. Every person is different and they have different responses. The response of messages is related to the moral and ethical values of the person to react. If the person has poor moral or ethical values, the response to certain situations could be violent; hurting other people could be of no meaning to the aggressor because he feels no guilt in performing violent acts. On the contrary, if the person has a good moral and ethical value the reaction to different situations will be thinking of the other person's feelings before making any judgment.

Every person has the right to express their feelings, no one has the right to hurt or offend you because of your beliefs. There are many ways to express different ideas without hurting people. As soon as someone feels uncomfortable because of something you said, it can be considered violence. The way of expression in our society, can be taken as violent or normal as part of our daily life. The different perceptions of the people may be considered as violent or normal, depends on the educational background, neighborhood, country, city or state. A person from New York will not act or talk the same way we talk or express in Puerto Rico. A tone of voice, the way of walking, the way you look can be considered violent if it's different from what you know and consider normal.

The way we talk to others is the mirror of ourselves. The ChalleNGe program has taught me one important phrase "Treat others as you want them to treat you". That phrase is a reflection of everything in life. I have learned in the program that my classmates used to yell at each other and what they received back was another yell. The cadre of the program used to say everything yelling at us, so we could listen. That was real hard for me to understand, why someone has to yell at me to say something simple.

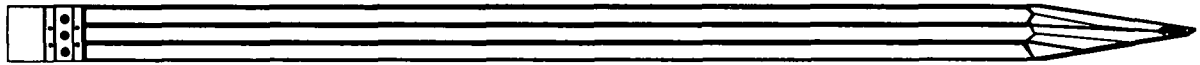
At the beginning it was hard, I didn't like to be yelled at. After a couple of months I also began to say everything yelling, even in the classroom. I guess that I got used to it. I think this also happens in real life, you get used to violence. Outside of the camp if I yell at someone, probably I'll get in

trouble, because yelling it's considered an act of violence. The ChalleNGe program has taught all of us that if you yell at someone, you have to expect a yell, if you treat someone eloquently and with respect, you have to expect the same behavior. Otherwise it will be considered odd, because you did not expect another reaction, and that could be considered violence.

Sometimes in life we are going to be witnesses of violent acts, if we do not act to stop the action of violence, we can be considered violent ourselves. No one has the right to hurt other human beings, because we all are equal. We all are equal as it is expressed in our constitution, the bible and the program that changed my life forever, ChalleNGe.

Yamil Rivera

Puerto Rico STARBASE



Juvenile Violence: How to Prevent It

I am a thirteen-year-old eight-grade student. I might be too young to know and understand the problems that exist in our society, but still I know about some of them, which influence our lives. One of these is juvenile violence. I think that the best solution to this problem should be through communication and with the help of professionals.

Sometimes I ask myself, why is there violence among young people? I have been told that this is due to factors such as drugs, child abuse, and alcoholism, among others. Then I ask myself again, then why haven't these problems reached me? It is then when I realize that I might be different because of the way I have been raised. I belong to different organizations in school such as: F.F.A. (Future Farmers of America), the Honor Roll, Police Athletic League, Students-Counselors, and others. I am also lucky to have very supportive parents and teachers who are available whenever I need them.

Therefore, I think that if every teen could get involved in constructive activities such as school organizations, and sharing quality time with their parents or friends, there should be no reason for them to get involved in violent activities. I also think we should obey the law.

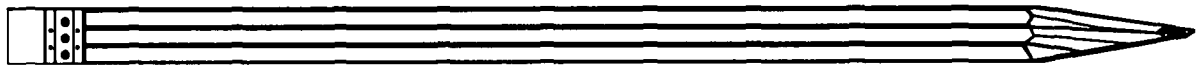
Some young people get involved with drugs because they feel isolated and lonely, others because they think drugs can make them look better or be cool. I do not think that drugs are any solution for their problems at home or school. I think that activities such as the following can help young people to avoid violence as well as other problems in our society. These activities could be studying, participating in sports, belonging in positive organizations, and communicating with their parents; so that young people know what to expect from the future. Young people can also talk to their teachers at school about their problems, because they can help them look for solutions. I think that having close relationship with our parents and obeying them always can help a lot. Young people should also choose their friends very carefully.

Parents should always respect their teen's opinions. Many young people complain that their parents do not respect their opinions and that they do not participate in their activities at school. Teens should know that their parents care about their performance in school. Also, adults might think that it is dangerous to talk about drugs to their children, because then they might start using them. I think that if they explain the consequences, then the teens will stay away from drugs; and they could help others who are already involved in drugs get out of this problem.

I have belonged to many organizations and programs, which have been very helpful in my life, but I think that STARBASE has helped me realize how valuable my life is. I enjoyed it very much and I will never forget the things that I learned with the program. I hope that this program continues giving meaning to other teen's lives, helping them stay away from drugs and violence.

Tanisha Hutchinson

South Carolina Challenge



Violence: The Downfall of America

Violence has been around since the beginning of time. The only difference is that people doing these acts of violence are getting younger and younger. This essay is about violence: the causes and the solutions.

There is no one cause of violence. Drugs and alcohol are two causes of violence. Drug related violence is a big problem. It mostly occurs in lower class areas where there is not a lot of money. Alcohol abuse can lead to violence because the intake of this drug can cause a person to function improperly and make bad decisions.

Misunderstood teens and neglected children are two other factors of violent activities. Misunderstood teens have no one to talk to and they have so much built up inside when it comes out it results to things like school shootings. Neglected children have no parental guidance, get away with a lot of things, live in abusive households, etc. and that results in little six year olds shooting other six year olds.

Instigation is another cause of violence. That is probably one of the biggest because almost everyone has been in a situation where someone else has instigated and suddenly a small thing has turned into a big thing for no reason. I think it is nonsense.

The solutions are easy to name but not so easy to put into action. One solution is gun control. If we could control the guns and the people who use them, the violence would go down. Another solution is if people learned coping skills and learned to talk things out instead of wanting to fight or grab a gun every time they have a disagreement, the world would be a better place. Another possible solution is minding your own business. If people learned to stay out of people's business and not start trouble out of spite, things would be better.

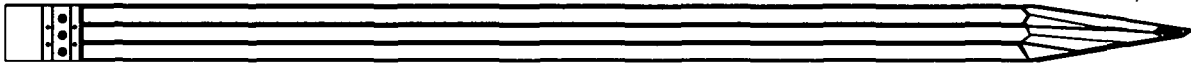
I have experienced one type of violence in my life: Abuse. I have encountered physical, mental, and sexual abuse all of my seventeen years. I have never been involved in any violent activity. I don't believe violence solves anything.

I have witnessed violence. For instance, when I was about seven years old, I went to a high school football game with my family. At the end of the game when everyone was going to their cars, bullets began to fly. We all ran to a nearby doorway that's when I saw a boy get shot. I was terrified. In another situation, in my neighborhood four boys jumped this boy. It was sickening. I am deeply afraid of any type of violence whether it is a fight or animal cruelty. I don't see how a person gets a thrill out of hurting another person or animal.

So, in conclusion, there has been and always will be some violence. I wish it wasn't true but it is. All we can do is try to keep ourselves and the ones we love safe.

Joshua Perrella

South Carolina ChalleNGe



Violence In The World

Violence in the world today
forces me to kneel and pray.
To pray for those who were victimized.
And for those who don't realize
that violence is leading us the wrong way.
Violence leads us down the path of destruction,
and it fills us with corruption.
Violence is in the world today.

Peer pressure and bad attitudes cause violence.
society would be better with silence.
Because someone states an opinion
and someone claims to get offended,
With this simple disagreement we have violence.
Violence can begin anytime, anywhere.
It can start and end with an evil glare.
Peer pressure and bad attitudes cause violence.

Violence is caused with dismay
and we see it every day.
With guns and drugs,
gangs with thugs.
Violence is seen in many ways.
Harassment and assault, verbal or not,
violence flares when tempers are hot.
Violence is witnessed with dismay.

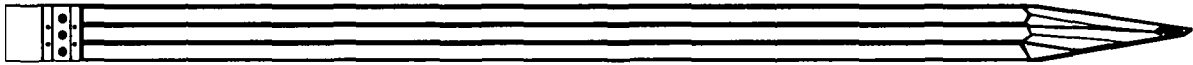
Violence in our schools is getting worse.
Hundreds of children end up in a hearse.
Kids kill kids every single day,
while the others cry as they pray.
I believe violence to be a curse.
No matter where we turn violence is by our side,
Even if we run forever or if we hide.
Violence in our schools is getting worse.

Violence has been seen through my eyes,
For this reason I must despise
A terrible violent act that I've seen
Committed by a large group of teens.

Why did the young man have to die?
A few people I knew were drunk
and somebody else talked junk.
Violence has been witnessed through my eyes.

Jessica Cottingham

South Dakota STARBASE



Youth Violence

It makes me mad to see all of the kids fighting and losing their tempers. Why can't they get along together? Just because we're all different, it doesn't mean anything. We are made different because we all have different personal lives. Some people have jobs like bus drivers, actors, policemen, storekeepers and doctors. Kids should dream of that instead of gangs and drugs. Some people get mad and go out to drink. Some people get mad at their kids while drinking. When people drink, it gets them stupid. They say it feels good but it doesn't. They should have never made such a drink like that. I thought this was supposed to be a good world but it isn't because someone had to make drugs.

During youth violence people hurt people. People yell at each other. Dogs bark all day. Dogs fight about twice a week. All because of kids telling them to go do this and go do that. Why can't it be good around here? People get in car crashes and get hurt. People get mad at other people for not doing what they say. People should love and respect one another. I learned that from my grandma. I try not to get involved in stuff but I love to be a part of everything. People need to stop the violence. Think about it before doing it! How would it affect someone? Instead of smoking or drinking, it should be hugging or kissing. Just don't think about the way it's going to affect you, it's going to affect everybody else, too.

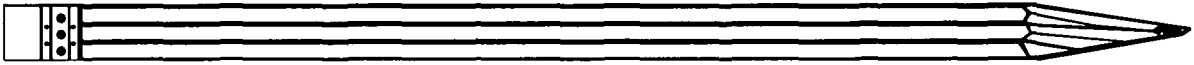
Some people should stop and listen to what the children have to say about how they feel about drinking and smoking. It hurts other people, not just one. They should have never made violent movies. We need a good future, there should be no drugs. People sell drugs to make money for new cars. A car can kill little kids easy. Kids break windows a lot, almost like we're in a death town. Little boys chew, and it's messy on the streets. I want a good life.

Youth violence makes me mad because it's scary to be around violent people. There are too many fights around this community, especially at the end of the year. A lot of things happen to young kids. Even like at Littleton, Colorado, the school shooting. Parents should discipline their kids. Most violence is caused over stupid stuff. When they get hurt they have to go to the hospital and have a lot of pain. Families are hurt because some of the kids die who are so young. Parents have to go to jail or to prison for their child's wrongdoings. Too many kids get attached to drugs fast. Drunk kids end up dead.

It is hard to stop the youth violence but kids can avoid it by doing positive things.

Talisa Fleury

South Dakota STARBASE



Youth Violence

Why do people have to drink beer? Every time they do drink it makes me feel so sad, painful and hurt. I don't like beer for a good reason, that's how my mother died. She was in a car wreck because she was drinking.

Also, I don't like people smoking cigarettes. Cigarettes are bad for your lungs. I don't like people smoking joints either because it's bad for your lungs. People on pot get crazy. I hope it doesn't happen to my family or friends.

If I could be on a TV show, I would say, "for you people who are watching this right now, you should be ashamed of yourselves for being on drugs. All of you should quit doing drugs so you can be drug free. You need to get help! I am ashamed of you people for carrying guns and shooting human beings for no reason. They had a family to take care of and now they don't have a mother or father all because of you."

People who use drugs, smoke cigarettes and drink often become violent. I don't like people drinking because every time someone does drink there always seems to be a death someplace. When there is a death it makes me hurt and feel so painfully sick. It makes me burst out into tears.

Why did those people have to go up to that school in the first place and start shooting everywhere and kill the poor people for no reason? That's not right and not fair. They had a good life ahead of them. I can't stop thinking about how it makes me feel. I feel anger towards those people who shot those kids who were so young.

They should not have invented guns, knives, drugs, and other weapons in the first place. That makes me feel like I am the one who shot them. People need to wake up and know what their kids are doing. If people see shooting on movies then they shouldn't even watch violent movies. If they can't handle a dumb old movie then don't watch them. They should respect people and not kill them!

Cigarettes, joints, beer and all that stuff could lead to the killing of human beings. Children have no reason for being violent. So please, please try with all your strength to be drug free. Stick with me now because I try not to do any kind of drugs. That is what I can do to prevent violence.

Please don't do drugs. Just say "no". Stay drug and alcohol free for your family and your best friend. Maybe he or she might get wasted away by someone on drugs.

So try your best to not do any kind of drugs or violent behavior. If you don't want to do it for yourself, do it for me. I still have a lot of pain inside of me because of my mother.

Shawna McGhee

South Dakota STARBASE



Youth Violence

How has youth violence affected my life? I have been pretty lucky not to be involved in youth violence. There was one time when I was seven years old when a gang of kids beat me up at school. There were about eight kids who beat me up because I was playing with kids they didn't like. When I was five years old I was sometimes left at home alone, and I think I could have become part of youth violence if I hadn't been adopted by a family that cares for me a lot.

I think that one of the causes of youth violence is that parents don't pay attention to their children then maybe they wouldn't get into as much trouble. Another reason for youth violence is peer pressure. Kids want to fit in with other kids so they do things they know are wrong just so they won't get teased from their friends. Maybe another cause of so much youth violence is because the law is too easy on kids. When kids get caught beating up on other kids, nothing happens to them. There is too much violence on TV. I think kids watch too much TV and try to act like them. Parents should keep an eye on their children and see what they are watching. Even the news is full of violence. I think kids need to see good things happening instead of bad things all the time.

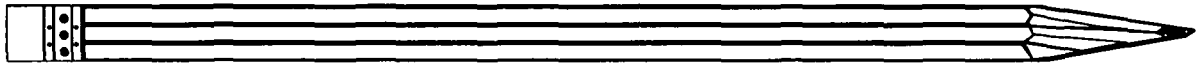
I know I can't stop youth violence all by myself, but I can help by not becoming part of youth violence. I can talk to my parents about it. I have a niece who is almost one year old. I can talk to her about problems with youth violence when she gets older and help by being a good role model. If I see youth violence happening I can help by telling someone older. Maybe if kids start telling more instead of turning their heads the other way, people will see that there really is a problem. But if kids tell, the violent kids will come after them. This is very scary for us. I sometimes wish children could change the laws. It is not fair for kids who don't get into trouble, because they follow the laws and see that nothing happens to kids who do break the law. All that happens is that they get talked to by the police. It is easy to become part of youth violence when nothing happens to you if you break the law.

I could maybe talk to our counselor about teaching more about youth violence in his or her classes. I think kids need to let everyone know that they are tired of youth violence.

Kids need to be kids, not criminals.

Perry Middletent

South Dakota STARBASE



Youth Violence

I don't get why people have to drink beer. Sometimes, I see people with knives and guns. I think violence is a very, very, very bad thing! Violence is harmful to people, and I wish it could stoop. How has youth violence affected my life? Youth violence affects my life because there is too much happening around the state and country. Sometimes, I wonder why people carry guns or knives.

What are the causes of youth violence? The causes of youth violence, to me, are that people should respect one another and help people when they need help. What can I do about youth violence? I can make sure that it doesn't happen to kids and other relatives. I heard that a first grader shot his classmate. I've been so worried something like that will happen here. When people hurt people, that's violence and I've seen it happen before.

The word, violence, really scares me so much. I don't like people drinking, smoking or people smoking weed, it is harmful for their lungs. Youth violence isn't something that happens once in awhile, it happens most of the time. Sometimes, kids bring pocketknives. Violence has some power, that power is to make people harm other people. Violence mostly happens at night, like when someone sees somebody they want to beat up, they might go and jump him.

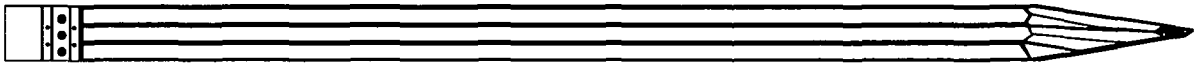
I think violence doesn't just happen to adults, it happens to everybody. I think it's not good for teenagers to drink and smoke. Violence is like something we can't control, it's like it makes us do things we don't want to do.

Sometimes, I see people drinking and smoking. I wish I could stop violence. Violence isn't only physical abuse, it's also verbal abuse. When kids call other kids names and continue to do so, the kids that are being teased get mad and will fight back which then leads to violence. There are so many different kinds of drugs besides pot and beer, like crack and crank around nowadays. It seems so much worse because it causes different kinds of feelings in people and is much more addictive. People die a quicker death by taking these drugs because they see things that aren't really there. Now they're on our reservation and more people are turning to these newer drugs instead of alcohol or pot.

Some kids just want to belong in the crowd so they turn to gangs. Gangs are more violent than any one person. When young gangs get together and start drinking or doing drugs they follow old people that are drunk and jump them to get their drugs. This turns to violence when the victim's family finds out because they want to go and fight the people. They want pay back for the victim. It will go on and on until somebody gets badly hurt, even death. Violence happens to the young and old. It may not only be alcohol, drugs or physical but also from verbal violence. People lose who they are by always being picked on, called names and they start to believe it and will not try to help themselves so we need to be there for them.

Sammie Taylor

South Dakota STARBASE



Youth Violence

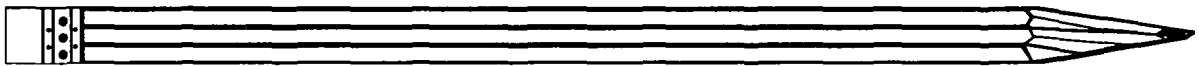
How has youth violence affected my life? I was a victim of youth violence once. In second grade while we were at recess playing on the school playgrounds, five or six kids ganged me. For no reason they jumped on me and started hitting and kicking me. They made my nose bleed. A teacher came along and made them stand on the wall. For a week, there was no recess for them. Mr. G., our principal at the time, told my mother about what had happened. Soon I got tired of being ganged and started to fight back. Now that I am older and stronger they don't pick on me. But, if they ever got back together again, I'm in big trouble. One of the kids that ganged me has moved so that's kind of a good thing. The rest of the kids don't bug me very much. I know they are a part of youth violence. I'm not so lucky as other children who have never experienced youth violence. I have been affected by youth violence for one year now. I'm still a little mad at the five or six kids for jumping me but it's probably not their fault.

What are the causes of youth violence? Children only act out what they learn from their parents or maybe they have an older brother or sister that they look up to and want to be like. I think youth violence shows how a kid is raised. If the parents or persons raising the kid are mean or violent, the kid will act the same way. Maybe they don't feel loved or that no one cares. Sometimes they try to fit into a gang or something, or they try to be cool just to impress their friends. Sometimes they just gang people because they feel like it. Maybe there was a lot of violence in their life. Sometimes it's friends that abuse them or are mean to them and maybe fear makes them do things. Sometimes a lot of movies have violence in them. Some music videos have violence. For weeks the news was full of school violence killings and they show this stuff over and over.

What can I do about youth violence? The first thing I must do about youth violence is to forgive the kids that ganged me. This is the only way they will stop hurting me. Next, I feel I must be good to everyone and treat them with respect. I must treat them the way I want to be treated. I must always be aware of youth violence whether it is myself or others involved. If I suspect youth violence, I must tell my teacher, counselor or tell my mom and dad. Sometimes it's a friend or cousin you can tell. I can encourage the school, community and law enforcement to start youth violence programs. I think youth violence programs should start here in the schools. Make the community aware of youth violence and gang related activities. Put a stop to gangs. I think the parents should talk to the kids. Ask them about their day. What did they do? What did they learn? What did they have for lunch? How do they feel? What would they like to see changed? Ask the kids every day. Soon the kids will be telling the parents all kinds of things that the parents would have never known. Parents and adults should listen to children. The last thing I can do about youth violence is to write an essay and tell you about how I feel and think about youth violence.

Ryan Bruno

**Texas Seaborne
ChallenNGe**



Drugs and Violence Aren't Cool

Youth violence is not that cool,
Especially while you're in school.
While some kids should be home in their beds,
They'd rather be smashing each other's heads.

Getting high is not that cool,
Especially if you're in a pool.
You might drown, and that'd be bad.
It'd make your mom and dad real sad.

Me, I've seen a fight or two.
I've even been in a few,
But everyone knows that fighting's wrong.
Why can't we all just get along?

Smoking weed and eating 'shrooms
Will surely lead you to your doom.
You'll get dumb, and never be the same.
You might even forget your own name.

Sometimes drugs can lead to violence.
Less fortunate kids are now in the past tense.
Get stoned, talk loud, and start lying--
Someone gets mad and bullets start flying.

I had a friend who was shot and killed
Over a few fake drugs he dealt.
I wanted to end the killer's worthless life,
But I know two wrongs don't make a right.

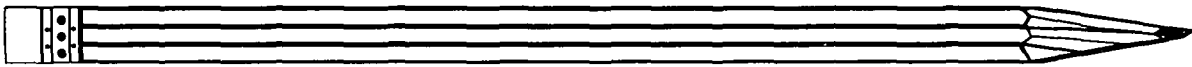
I hate violence, and I'm not the only one.
So, why can't we try to get something done
About all the kids that are shot everyday?
Haven't you ever heard, "If there's a will, there's a way"?

Put happiness in place of anger.
Don't be like some stupid gang banger.
Stay positive and make something of yourself.
Drugs stunt your growth; you'll be a retarded elf.

So, next time you want to smoke a bowl,
Just remember that I told you so.
Next time you feel like hitting that fool,
 Just remember! Drugs and violence aren't cool.

Arceli Davila

**Texas Seaborne
ChalleNGe**



Helping to Stop Youth Violence and Drug Abuse

My name is Araceli Davila, and I am writing on helping to stop youth violence and drug abuse. My three main ideas are how youth violence affected my life, the causes of youth violence, and what I can do about youth violence.

First, youth violence has affected my life in many ways. The neighborhood I used to live in made race a huge issue. Only certain races lived in the area, which were Hispanics and Blacks. Whenever they saw a White person in the neighborhood, they would start a fight with him or rob him of his money and jewelry. Also, there were gangs -- different kinds of gangs. Whenever one gang came across another gang, they would start fighting or shooting. It mostly happened across the street from where I used to live. One more example would be if you wore the wrong color of clothes or drove the wrong color of car, which all depended on the gang that was in that area, you would get beaten up or shot at.

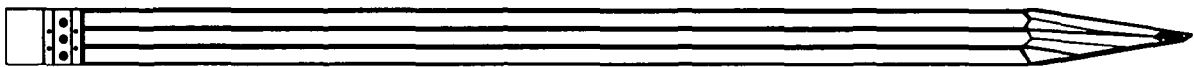
Furthermore, there are different causes for youth violence. For example, drug abuse plays a huge role in youth violence. Whenever teens smoke marijuana or sniff crack, they lose their smart thinking and begin to do really dumb things. For instance, they pick fights with people, knowing that they are Hercules, and start fighting with whomever for no particular reason. Another reason would be family problems. The parents may be too hard on the child, so the child becomes rebellious and wants to do his/her own thing--his/her own way. So, the child gets kicked out and is forced to survive on his/her own. Now, the child is forced to survive, with all means of stealing, lying, and creativity--just for survival. I believe another reason for causes of youth violence would be lack of discipline. For example, a parent may get after their child for coming home late. The parent may threaten them and never keep the threat, so the child keeps on breaking the rules. Since the parent does not live up to the threat, the child thinks that since they didn't get me this time, they won't get me next time.

Finally, what I can do about youth violence is help teens realize that violence gets you no where. You are going to have to learn how to get along with others and how to solve problems without violence. Let's say you work with an annoying co-worker, and one day your co-worker does something to you to make you mad. Instead of retaliating on him, you must learn how to suck it up and drive on. You must realize that you need a job and cannot afford to get fired or quit, because you will then be without a job. Another reason would be joining a program to help prevent kids from getting involved with youth violence. Helping kids realize that violence is wrong is a good way to keep the number of acts of youth violence down. If we teach kids the badness of youth violence, they would not want to end up that way. The last thing would be recruiting for a certain program of the military. For example, Seaborne ChalleNGe Corps. Seaborne is a good program that can help any teenager escape violence and drug abuse. I can help tell teens about the advantages Seaborne can offer and the new, nonviolent life they can learn to live in a matter of five months.

In conclusion, those were my reasons as to how youth violence has affected my life, what causes youth violence and drug abuse, and what I can do about youth violence.

Abel Barrera

Texas STARBASE



Life in a Troubled Neighborhood

I live in a neighborhood where you have to be very careful and aware of what you are doing. The police normally visit the area four or five times a week. That worries me because I'm afraid that something might happen to my family, like what happened to my father's truck.

My father works a lot, mostly during the night. He works hard for his money and comes home really tired and sleepy. One day he went to visit a car dealership because he wanted a new truck. Actually, we all wanted a new truck. He found a black truck with yellow and red stripes that he really liked. He traded in his old truck, made a down payment and got it. I felt kind of sad because we had a lot of memories about the old truck. But I also felt happy because the new truck gave me the opportunity to build and create new memories. It was as if with the new truck we could start all over.

Unfortunately, that happiness didn't last for long. When we came home with the new truck, we never thought that there would be any difficulties, but there were some neighborhood teenagers that got jealous and started to cause problems. One time my father was washing his truck at the car wash when these three teenagers ran up to him and started beating him. Fortunately, they weren't there for long. When my father came home, he had bruises all over his body and a bloody nose.

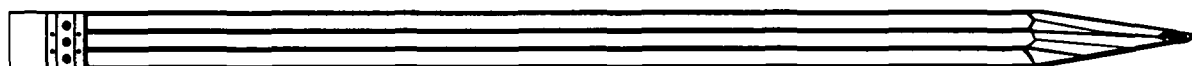
A few months after that attack, something else happened, but this time to our truck. Around 2:30 AM this past Sunday, some people came and poured some liquid on our truck that made the paint peel off. They poured it on the right side of the truck. We found out about it in the morning when my mom came home from work. We called the police who came out to inspect the damage. This was not the first time that something like this had happened to us, but we hope it is the last.

The teenagers that did this are usually hanging around together. They don't really hurt people, but they like to damage property. I don't know if they go to school, but every time that I see them they are just hanging around. They do these things because they want to call attention to themselves. Maybe they feel alone, like nobody loves or needs them. They escape with drugs to relax and calm down their emotions. But that does not last very long. What they did to my dad's truck made me feel scared because one day they might attack us. I felt sad because they damaged something that we worked hard for. They shouldn't destroy somebody's dreams and hopes.

I think that these teenagers should communicate with their real families more often and participate in after school programs like the one that we have at my school. There are so many positive programs out there that they can join. If they feel lonely, they should talk to a friend that is not a drug addict. Most of all, they should find out what their dream is in life. If they find out what their dream is, they would get help and probably stop using drugs. They would stop hurting themselves and other people and living up to their dreams. It all starts with caring about something.

Daniel Coker

Texas STARBASE



Just Think

Pow, pow
I heard a loud gunshot.
I heard screams of terror.
I heard horrible cries for help.
I heard ear-splitting sirens.
I heard a mother's weeping sobs.

A ten-year old has just been shot.
An honor student at that.
Lying in the street
Bleeding to Death.

Startled from my dream
I awaken.
Sweating, shaking...
Thinking of how the dream was too real.
And how things like that happen
And lives are lost
And thousands die everyday.

If only he knew the secret
Of solving differences without violence.
If only he knew that drugs are bad.
If only he had been more careful.
If only the guns had been locked up.
If only he had made a better choice.
If only... .if only... .if only.

I get up from my bed
Go out and turn on the TV.
A cartoon is on.
Boom, bam, wham, ouch, splat
Violence.
I turn off the TV.

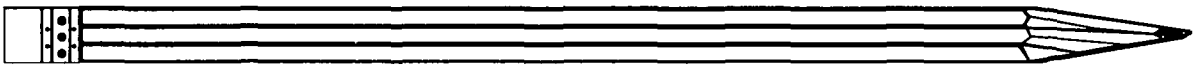
I think.
How can I stop this?
And then an idea strikes me.
I could tell my friends and everyone I know,
No drugs

Violence
No guns
No carelessness
Just think!

You can save your life
If you could only
Just think.

Meagan Laqua

Texas STARBASE



Hugs vs. Drugs

Drug abuse and violence are very bad.
It makes me angry, scared and sad
to see people taking drugs and drinking
without even stopping and thinking.
When people get mad, sad or upset, they drink and use drugs
instead of going and asking for kisses and hugs.

How has it affected me?
Well, now you are about to see.
I watch it each night on TV.
Is that how you want it to be?
They say it's everywhere.
It's a big nightmare.
I want to be a role model for everyone in the world to see.
Will you decide that's what you want to be?

What causes it?
Kids see other people doing it.
They use drugs, smoke and they drink.
They don't even stop to think.
They think it looks really cool,
but that just makes them the fool.

What should we do?
Drug abuse and violence makes me blue.
If ever you feel left out,
don't be confused or in doubt.
Find a parent or teacher,
or on the news you'll be the feature.
Don't take drugs if you're feeling low --
or with your life you will pay.
Just say no -- is what you are supposed to say.

Michael Mays

Texas STARBASE



The Effects of Youth Violence and Drug Abuse

Violence and drug abuse have affected my life. Youth violence has especially affected my life. Once when I was involved in a serious fight, one of my eyes was closed for a few days. I nearly had legal charges filed on me because I broke the other boy's nose and sent him to the hospital. Youth violence can hurt a person seriously, or may even result in death. Another personal experience that happened to me when I was in third grade was when a fifth grader started some 'mess' by pushing me down. I was hospitalized because my nose was broken, and I was knocked unconscious because my head rammed into a wall. When I awoke, I was in a hospital bed, with a nose brace, and a cast on my fractured leg! So as a result of youth violence, I could not walk with a fractured leg. I had to use a wheelchair for about a month. Also, with my broken, swollen nose, I could hardly smell or taste my food.

Some causes of youth violence are aggravation, cursing, and talking about someone's family. When someone aggravates someone else, that person becomes angry and wants to hurt the person. As a result, there is a physical fight. When someone actually curses someone, the person becomes angry and wants to fight. If a person talks about someone else's dead relatives, the offended person asks the person not to talk about their family, and that can cause a very uncalled for fight.

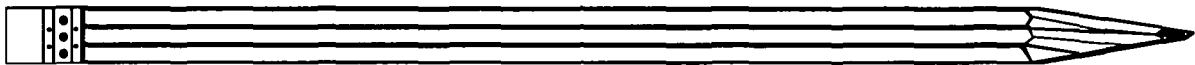
Drugs have also strongly affected my life. My biological mom died from drug abuse. When I was younger, she sniffed cocaine, smoked marijuana, and used needles to 'shoot' a heated substance into her vein. Once I remember seeing her 'popping' blue pills. So she died because all the drugs made a blood vessel rupture and she collapsed. There are several causes of drug abuse. One is when someone asks a person to just try marijuana, cocaine, or 'rock' cocaine. Sometimes young people want to try new things to 'get high.' Mixing drugs to get a bigger effect from drugs can be very dangerous. Sometimes people inhale paint or chemicals like 'WD-40'. If kids use many different drugs at one time, they can have a drug overdose.

Even though youth violence and drug abuse are serious problems today, there ARE solutions for them! One is for a student to 'talk a fight out'. I suggest that the person tell the aggravator that he does not want to fight, or the person could tell an adult about the problem. Another solution is that the person could tell the person who wants to fight that he is more mature than to want to fight. If the person keeps on bothering the student, he should just walk away.

If anyone asks a student to take a drug, he should tell them that he does not want to take a chance on dying, but wants to savor life, and that he loves his family too much to throw his health or life away. Another suggestion is that the person could tell the drug 'pusher' that he does not need an addictive substance to make him feel good. He has learned to be a satisfied person who enjoys life without becoming dependent on outside stimulants or depressants.

Jaime Padilla

Texas STARBASE



What Is the Right Thing to Do?

My definition of being a good citizen is following all the laws and being loyal. These things include not loitering on any grounds or the police will have to tell you to stop loitering. Also you should get a group of volunteers to get together and clean up places that are not really clean. Pick up bottles, broken glass, scrap pieces of paper, and other kinds of litter for you and the people who live in your community. Another way to be a good citizen is not doing drugs, child abuse, or other things like that.

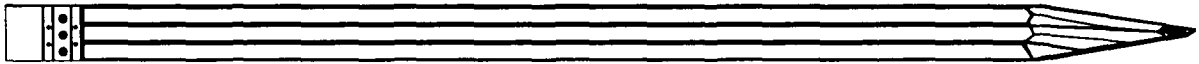
Things like children doing violence and drugs have made me concerned and thoughtful. I have been concerned because nobody knows when or if it is going to strike them. That's why I am concerned. I have been thinking of the consequences of what will happen if I do it. I will not do it because I talk to my family about these things and they give me tips to avoid it.

What I think causes kids to do drugs and violence is problems at home with their parents or at school. Kids just get really depressed and will do anything to feel better. Then one day the kids are going to come home all messed up smoking marijuana. The parents will then realize what they have done wrong.

The way that I can avoid this is to talk to my parents a lot about what I am doing everyday. I can talk to parents about what is happening in my life, have family meetings, and play with my family members games that we enjoy like dominoes, have fun and enjoy the time that we have together.

Kryssia Pineda

Texas STARBASE



Drugs Can Change Your Life

Have drugs or violence changed your life? It has changed my life many, many times, that I can remember. I'll tell you about something that I remember and how violence changed my life.

My cousin, Luis, was in a gang. One time my cousin was in a fight with another gang. I saw all of the fight. I saw him fight with another kid. He got really hurt bad that day. He told my Grandma that he had fallen out of a tree and hurt himself. I was there when he was fighting, and I was there when he lied to my Grandma. I like him because he is my favorite cousin, and it hurt me on the inside to hear him lie. Since that day my life changed because when he wasn't in the gang he was an "A" student and he wanted to be an astronaut like I want to be.

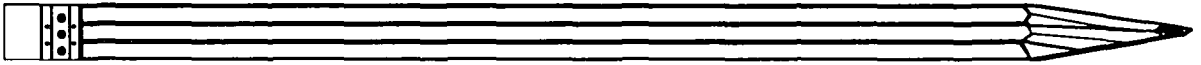
I asked my cousin, "Luis, why are you in that gang, and why do you fight with other gangs, then lie to Grandma?" He said, "It's big kid stuff, and that I wouldn't understand." That day my cousin told my Grandma that he was going to an after school class. I followed him because I knew there wasn't an after school class. I followed him until he entered an old house. That house was scary and I was scared. I saw in the window and there were other kids in the house, about 10 girls and 14 boys counting my cousin. I think that he was doing that because he wanted to be cool, but he was cool when he was in school. He was the smartest kid in the school. I believe that the other kids of the gang wanted more kids so they could win in gang fights, or wanted the gang to be stronger.

I was determined to help him even if it cut my life short. He was my first cousin to be in a gang. One day he stayed in the house, and I told him about his girlfriend Cristin's feelings. When that happened he told me that he would stop going to the gang.

Four years have passed and he does not hang out with the gang or go to the gang anymore. I'm proud of what I did and I'll remember that for the rest of my life.

Miriah Heffner

Virginia ChalleNGe



The Hard Way

In my life I have dealt with a tremendous amount of violence from people being physically abusive and also from being under the influence of alcohol and drugs. What most people tend to forget is that alcohol is also a drug. It is a depressant and causes some people to become very violent and out of control. The combination can be lethal, especially if you add a troubled teen to the equation. There are a lot of teens with little or no direction in their lives. They don't have someone to tell him or her what to do and or when to do it. We like to think of ourselves as grown-up, but like adults, we make mistakes and need help in correcting ourselves because we haven't figured out a lot of things yet.

There are numerous causes of youth violence and drug abuse. Because we teenagers have little direction, we tend to hang out with the wrong people. These people may sell or use drugs. Peer pressure among young people is probably one of the biggest problems. Because most kids want to fit in or be considered cool, they will try just about anything. I also feel that drugs and violence run in a vicious cycle. Where there's one, there's usually the other. It always starts out so innocently, but then can lead to a dangerous situation, with someone usually getting hurt. I should know, it happened to me.

I am 16 years old and have been living in the same little house for the past eleven years, in the same neighborhood with the same negative influences. There was always constant fighting and arguing in my house. I never had a childhood because my dad was a Navy man and everything had to be perfect. Once I got home from school I had to do my homework and clean the house. If I said anything back to him he would whip me with his belt and beat me until I was red as a cherry. Eventually he and my mom divorced. It was great because I didn't get beaten, but it was terrible because my mom had to work long hours leaving my brother and I home alone most of the time.

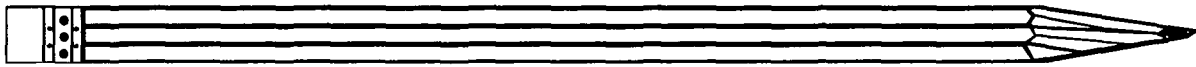
This was when I decided that I would do my own thing since I was pretty much on my own anyway. I started hanging around the wrong crowd and started doing things I shouldn't have done like drugs and sleeping around with different people. One night, around 10, a bunch of people and I were all at a park drinking and smoking pot, goofing around. The guys started messing with me and pushing me around. I was so intoxicated that I could barely stand straight. I started running my mouth and before I knew it, I woke up on the ground, bloody, sore, cold and alone. They had beaten me up, raped me, and then left me half-naked out in the cold.

It is up to us to make some positive changes and help stop or reduce the violence and drug abuse in our neighborhoods and community. Through education, mentoring programs, and sports many young people can find alternative activities to fill their time or the time of someone who is younger than they are. I was part of a group called the Teen Advisory Group, a group for teenagers who need people to talk too other than their parents. Through my own experiences I feel that I can help them make some positive choices. Young people also need to keep an open line of communication with their parents and talk to them when they have a problem. Make an appointment if you have to, but talk to them nevertheless. Statistics are now showing that parents who talk to their

kids have less problems with drug use and violence. There are also alternative programs like Commonwealth ChalleNGe that provide a strict disciplined environment for teens who need a big help in changing their lives. I know, because it's changed mine!

Ben McKellips

Virginia ChalleNGe



Too Close to Home

The world is full of violence, which some of us hate and some of us hunger for. I hate violence because it does nothing but cause pain and suffering. It has brought too many problems into my life. Unfortunately, violence is seen everywhere and I wish that there was someone who could put a stop to it.

I live in an area where people I've known have been killed. Many of the people I have hung out with were in neighborhood crews, state gangs, or even world-wide organizations. I am the kind of person who makes friends easily, so some of my friends who joined gangs were actually enemies with each other leaving me stuck in the middle. It really didn't bother me because I was able to be friends without being mixed up in their gangs. I did a lot of things I shouldn't have done and am not proud of, and looking back, I know it was really stupid. The worst thing I ever did was to hang out with one certain group. I started to become close friends with this group of people and they became a part of me like my family. The group went up a level, to a state gang and then became an organization.

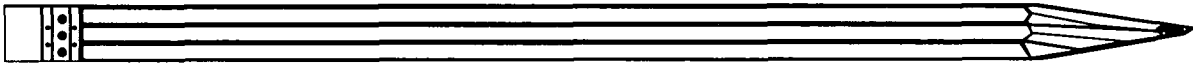
One of my closest friends that I used to go to school with was in this organization. He was part of the group symbol, making him higher than most people. He was known to the rest of us as King Knowledge. There were some who felt that he had too much power, that he was taking his authority to the extreme, so four people from the group asked him to meet them somewhere. When he arrived, they all jumped him and then stabbed and killed him with a knife. Of course they got caught. According to the paper they even confessed to the murder. Four guys, my age, with the rest of their lives ahead of them, but not any more. After they go to trial, they will probably face imprisonment of up to life, in jail. They will never see, smell or hear the things that you and I take for granted every day.

I feel that young people turn to drugs and violence for many reasons. In today's society, many kids are left on their own to fend for themselves. There are a lot of single parents out there who do not have the time or the energy to put in a full day's work and then have to go home and care for their children so they are not able to provide discipline or care for their own children. Therefore, many kids turn to their friends and the street for comfort or advice instead of their parents. Because these friends listened, they consider them family, people who supposedly care about them, but they don't.

With little or no supervision, kids can get away with just about anything. That's why I feel that there needs to be more after school programs available to kids starting at a younger age. Also sports are an excellent way for kids to keep busy and build self-esteem at the same time. If your parents or an older brother or sister are not around to make sure you do the right thing, then chances are you will make mistakes. I did, and I am not proud of them. By getting out of the environment I was in, I was able to think more clearly and see for the first time what was really in front of me. These people were not my friends. They were major distractions that I could not get rid of on my own. I was not able to see right from wrong or appreciate the real family I have. I know that I cannot stop the violence, but I can help to reduce it. I hope that I will be able to help someone before it's too late, because I do not want to lose any more friends.

Matthew Berg

Wisconsin ChalleNGe



Cease the Shedding of Young Blood

Youth violence might not be something we think about everyday, but that doesn't mean that it is not important. Do you know anyone who rolls out of bed and thinks to himself, "What can I do to stop youth violence today?" Probably not. But whether we think about it everyday or not, we can all agree that something needs to be done. The problem of youth violence has become more definite. The place to stop youth violence is in the home. Parents should talk to their children about violence and why it is wrong.

Youth violence saddens me. Although, I will admit that when I was younger I would be one of the many students standing there cheering and yelling while a fight was going on. Now that I am older and have seen more violence, I realize how senseless it is. I have witnessed youth violence from one-on-one fist fights to gang shootouts. What was the point? Someone looked at you the wrong way or wants to take over your turf, so they can sell more drugs. Doesn't that seem ludicrous? It is pointless to kill innocent people caught in the crossfire of a gang war.

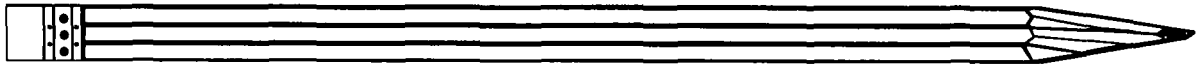
There are a lot of gangs in the city where I live. I had a lot of friends who were either in gangs themselves or had older brothers who were. I have a lot of friends who have been stabbed or shot. When I was younger I would not hesitate to punch someone if they made me angry enough. The fights I was in were not major. What caused me to feel that I had no other choice but to be belligerent? That I could not tell you. I have heard of research and statistics that say children who come from abusive families are more likely to be violent. I happen to come from a dysfunctional family. My father was an abusive drug addict and alcoholic. Violence was not uncommon in my house. So, is it a coincidence that years later I start getting into gangs, fights, drugs, and things of that nature? An abusive family is not the complete reason I turned to violence, but I am sure it had a lot to do with it. Kids do not want to be violent. It is, more than likely, learned behavior.

They could learn it from television, their friends, or even by reading violent literature. When I say that they can learn it from television, I'm not saying the television is sending them secret messages. I am only saying that sometimes, young children don't realize that the characters on television are not real and they may try to act like them. For instance, have you ever seen two six-year-olds kicking and hitting each other, because they were pretending to be their favorite Power Ranger characters? Sometimes that behavior can change into more aggressive behavior as they get older. In addition to television there are many other sources that children could learn violence from. They can learn it from their friends or even by reading violent literature

The most important thing that parents and mentors can teach children is the difference between right and wrong. The best way to do this is to tell children why it is wrong to use violence and the affect of violence on people's lives. Sometimes small children do not realize that it is wrong to hit people. Have you ever seen a young child strike another? When the parent or caretaker asks them why they did it, they try to justify it. They might say, "he took my toy, so I hit him," as though it was okay, because that child did something to them. We need to teach children that it is not okay. Another thing parents can do is teach by example. They cannot be violent towards each other or their children. It is important not only to stop youth violence, but adult violence also. Let's all work together to make the world a better, not to mention, friendlier place.

Amy Dolato

Wisconsin ChalleNGe



Beginning of the End

"Do you wish to appeal our decision? (waiting for response)... Do you want to appeal your dismissal, Cadet Dolato?"

"No, send me home!" I replied.

On March 19, 1999 I began what was supposed to be a new life. It was my first day at the ChalleNGe Academy. I was focussed on changing and ready to overcome any obstacle that stood in my way. Well, to say the least, I failed. On May 9 (Mother's Day) I came face to face with youth violence. I lost my bearing, all discipline, and participated in a riot. Out of pure stupidity and lack of self-discipline, five cadets and I physically and emotionally abused another person. On May 14th, I was standing in front of a disciplinary board, telling them I wanted to go home, and, consequently, I was dismissed. This was the point where I came to the realization that youth violence is a problem that needs to be put to an end.

All youth violence occurs as a result of something. But what? Many say it is the abuse of drugs and alcohol. While under the influence, a child or a young adult loses most logical thought, the ability to distinguish right from wrong and, more importantly, the line where reality turns to fantasy. In some cases these fantasies lead to youth violence.

Another cause of youth violence is the surroundings in which a youth is raised. If the environment is mentally, physically, or emotionally abusive the child may grow up believing forms of violence are acceptable behaviors. Also, if drugs or alcohol are part of the child's environment, it may effect the way they perceive violence. There are also other causes of youth violence, but these seem to be the most commonly recognized.

Different people have different opinions on how to stop youth violence. To a certain extent they are all correct or successful, but whether or not they are put into action is up to you and me.

I have a few ideas on how to assist in the elimination of violence among youths. First of all, I think we need to focus more attention on teaching youths about the line between reality and make-believe. Too many kids look at acts of violence as being appropriate or "the right thing to do". Distinguishing real life from television is a problem that we need to be aware of as a society.

Young people are not the only ones that need to concentrate on right and wrong though; parents also need to put effort into stopping youth violence. Parents need to be aware of the things children are learning at home. If children are abused at home, there is a good chance they will be abusive; if they grow up around drugs and violence, they may come to believe that violence is right. Parents need to watch their actions even closer than the rest of society.

The vast majority of society experiences some sort of youth violence each day, whether it is on television, in real life, in fights, gang-related incidents, emotional or mental abuse, a result of drugs and alcohol, or, increasingly, youth-related murders. There are many causes of violence among

youths that can be altered or even dismissed from our society. People are also aware of the solution to violence in society: we need to work together to bring it to a halt. Society would be safer and more beneficial if this happens.

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