
Michael Gerald Sheehan

WHAT STUDENTS CAN DO

To Prevent School Shootings



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**We Have The
Power**

Each of us is responsible for our own behavior.

We are not responsible for the violence of other students.

We are not to blame for school violence, but there is something we can do to help prevent violence in the future.

There are many things others can do, too, but this book is about what students can do.

It's hard to understand
how someone could shoot
other people.

If we feel connected
to other people,
we could never shoot them.

Only a student who doesn't
feel connected to the rest of
us could shoot someone.

A student who feels
connected to us
will not want to hurt us
or our friends.

To prevent school shootings,
we can make sure
every student feels included.

We can make sure
no one feels like an outsider.

We can make sure
no one feels left out.

What makes a student feel left out?

A student who gets pushed around, bullied or called names feels left out.

A student who is humiliated and gets joked about feels left out.

A student who isn't listened to or accepted feels left out.

To prevent school shootings,
we can stop bullying and
pushing students around,
stop calling names,
stop joking about others,
stop ignoring other students
and stop rejecting people.

The surest way
to make our schools safe
is to make sure every student
is treated with kindness and
respect.

2

A Basic Human Need

To totally reject someone is to deny them a basic human need.

Everyone needs to feel connected and included.

We can't always help people to feel included at home, at work, or in their own neighborhood, but we can help people to feel included at school.

What we can do to make
every student feel included is:
be nice to everyone.

Never be mean to anyone.

Don't encourage others to be
mean.

Don't praise or reward people
who are cruel to other
students.

Don't laugh, give your
approval, or join in
when someone is being
mean and hurtful.

Let them know it's not cool
to hurt other people's
feelings.

3

The Meaning Of Cool

What makes a person cool?

Does driving a fast car
make a person cool?

Does scoring points in games
or wearing certain clothes
make a person cool?

Does playing in a band,
being a cheerleader,
or dating a cheerleader
make a person cool?

Nice people can do all these things, but so can bullies.

If a bully does all these things, does that make them cool?

Who is more cool, a cruel bully who drives a fast car, plays in a band and dates a cheerleader...
or an ordinary guy who treats everyone with respect?

It's not what people own,
how they look,
how they perform,
or who they hook up with
that makes a person cool.

What makes a person cool is
how they treat
other people.

4

Rejection Causes Danger

The bully who makes
someone feel rejected and left
out is pushing that student
away from all of us
and making that student
dangerous to our loved ones.

Bullies can make school a
dangerous, life-threatening
place for everyone.

That's how serious it is
to hurt or make fun of other
people.

Is there a difference between
a dictator who drives a
minority out of his country
and a bully who drives the
abused, lonely students out of
our school community?

We may think it's just
harmless fun,
but pushing people around
is a little act of violence that
leads to bigger acts of
violence.

Calling people names
is a little act of violence.

Joking about another student
is a little act of violence.

Ignoring someone
is a little act of violence.

Rejecting someone
is a little act of violence.

If someone is pushed around,
called names, joked about,
ignored and rejected over and
over...

all those little acts of violence
against them can build up
inside until they explode in
one big act of violence
against everyone around
them.

The way to prevent that one big act of violence, the school shooting, is to prevent all the little acts of violence that lead up to it.

Gardeners know that to prevent weeds we have to do more than cut off the parts we can see.

To prevent weeds we need to pull them out by the roots.

To prevent the large acts of violence that are school shootings, we need to pull *them* out by their roots: the small acts of violence that feed them and make them grow.

This means putting an end to the kind of rejection that makes students so hurt, angry and disconnected that they are capable of murder.

Adults are responsible for pulling out any roots of rejection they may have caused, but only we can pull out the roots of disrespect for each other in school that alienates certain individuals from the school community.

5

We Can End Rejection

Some students feel rejected
before they come to school.

They may have been
alienated by their families
or bullied by the older kids
in their neighborhood.

We didn't necessarily cause
the rejection that makes
someone turn to violence.

Our choice is:
do we want to add to it
or put an end to it?

We may not be the problem,
but we could be the solution.

Think about how students
treat each other today.

How many ways do we hurt,
humiliate or make other
students feel left out?

It's not just bullying
and teasing
that hurts others.

Spreading rumors,
gossip and telling lies
hurts people, too.

Criticizing people's clothes,
cars, looks, income and
boyfriends or girlfriends
is a form of rejection.

Frowning at people
and acting superior
are ways of hurting
and rejecting someone.

What students do we reject
because their interests
are different from ours?

What students do we reject
because they're not quite
as sophisticated, grown up or
mature as we are?

Instead of hurting them,
ridiculing them
or rejecting them,
why don't we help them?

Why don't we teach them?

Putting an end to rejection
means accepting everyone
for who they are - and
reaching out to those who are
already disconnected.

6

Reaching Out Doesn't Have To Be Difficult

Reaching out doesn't have to take up much of our time.

Reaching out doesn't have to be done alone.

We can have a friend or two with us when we reach out to a lonely student.

Reaching out doesn't mean we have to hang out with someone all of the time.

We may not have common interests or beliefs.

Reaching out just means letting people know we accept them as part of our community.

Caring about people just means letting people know we respect them as fellow human beings who deserve fair treatment.

We can do that just by
smiling at everyone.

We can still have favorite
friends who are closer to us
than others.

We can still spend most of
our time with our close
friends...

...but if we want to help, we
can also spend a little time
with students who seem left
out.

We can still enjoy our private groups and private parties...
...but if we want to help, we can also have some groups and parties where everyone's invited and accepted.

We can still go out with people we especially like and say no to someone we don't want to go with.

Making students feel included does not mean having to date or hang out with someone we don't want to be with.

It doesn't mean rescuing them, enabling their addictions, giving up any part of ourselves or pretending to be something we're not.

Making students feel included means treating everyone the way we would like to be treated.

Remember that sometimes lonely people group together.

Groups of outsiders still feel left out.

Students who are in groups of outsiders still feel rejected by the school community.

We can reach out to them,
too.

7

It's Got To Be Real

Others won't feel accepted
if the only reason we include
them is to protect ourselves
from violence.

That would mean
we're only thinking of
ourselves.

For others to feel included,
they have to know
we care about them, too.

One lesson the shootings
teach us is that caring about
some people, but not others,
leads to separation...
and violence.

We're not just including
everyone because we're
afraid an outsider might hurt
us.

We're including everyone
because we care about
everyone.

There shouldn't be any
outsiders.

We care about every human
being for his or her own sake.

We don't want anyone to be
so hurt, alone and unhappy
that they would kill
somebody.

How would we feel if we
were rejected by everyone at
school?

Making a student feel like an outsider is torture.

We don't want to stand around and watch anyone being tortured.

How many times
do we watch others
being hurt without
doing something
to make them feel better?

Maybe we're afraid
to confront a bully -
but we can still reach out
to the students they hurt.

Let the victims know
we're on their side -
not the bully's.

Let the student who gets hurt
know they are not alone.

8

**We're All In This
Together**

It's not just our schools,
but our whole future
that's affected.

We'll be spending
the rest of our lives
with the students we see
around us today.

We're all the same age.

We're all growing up
together.

When we're thirty,
they'll all be thirty.

When we're forty-five,
they'll all be forty-five.

The more students
we laugh at and reject today,
the more disconnected,
dangerous people we'll have
in our society tomorrow.

What we do now will change
our quality of life forever.

By making sure
everyone feels accepted,
we're preventing
school shootings now...
and we're preventing
even more violence
in the future.

Every criminal
in today's society
is someone who
feels disconnected
from the rest of us.

Criminals couldn't shoot
people, steal from them
or hurt people in other ways
if they felt connected to us.

By making sure students our
own age don't feel left out,
we're preventing them from
becoming tomorrow's
criminals.

That makes tomorrow safer
and happier for all of us.

We're making the whole
world
a nicer, safer place
for ourselves
and for our loved ones
for the rest of our lives.

9

This Changes Everything

This plan will help prevent more than school shootings and crime in the future.

This plan will help prevent drug abuse, alcoholism and teen suicide.

This plan will help prevent so much more because loneliness, the feeling of being disconnected, is at the root of all these problems.

Everyone who becomes a criminal must feel disconnected, but every student who feels disconnected doesn't necessarily become a criminal.

Some students who feel left out are just unhappy.

Some eat too much or start drinking alcohol.

Some students abuse drugs.

Some get sick and die.

Some students commit
suicide.

Some just get mean and hard
to get along with, ruining
their relationships.

If we think it's cool to make
fun of others, to bully them
and reject them...

...we'll grow up in a world
with more sadness:

a world with more bulimics
and alcoholics; a world with
more sickness and drug
addiction; a world with more
broken families; a world with
more thieves and murderers.

If we think its cool to be nice
to others, to show respect
and accept them...

...we'll grow up in a world
with more happiness:

a world with more creativity
and invention; a world with
more health and relaxation; a
world with more generosity
and forgiveness.

The future will be happier for everybody if there are fewer sick, mean, greedy and unhappy people who hold a grudge against humanity.

All we have to do to help prevent so much pain and suffering is to be polite.

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**Change Or Be
Changed**

If we don't start
treating each other better,
we leave the authorities
no choice but to police us
more closely.

We can tell the difference
between a joke among friends
and a bully's cruel put-
downs. Can the authorities?

We can tell if the joker
is smiling and if they hang
out with the person they joke
about. Can the authorities?

If we don't all learn how
to get along with each other,
the authorities may feel they
have to expel everyone who
jokes about anyone.

They may censor our movies,
our music, our phones and
our computers.

The more separated we are
from each other, the more
violence will happen...
and the more rules the
authorities will have to make
and enforce in order to
control the violence.

The more rules they make to
control the violence,
the more freedom we lose
and the more we live in a
kind of prison.

We are becoming prisoners
of our own petty bickering
and separatism.

We are all becoming
prisoners, and targets of
madmen, because of a few
bullies to whom no one will
stand up and a few hurt loners
to whom no one will reach
out.

**Surveillance And
Quick Response Are
Not Prevention**

Using the law to control us
may suppress the symptoms
but it can never solve the
deeper problem of our own
cruelty to each other.

School shootings are just one
of the cruelties we live with
every day.

Do we want to prevent the
most extreme form of cruelty,
but continue to live with all
the rest of it?

It can't be done.

To eliminate the most extreme form of teenage cruelty, we need to eliminate the less extreme forms of cruelty that push students to the final level.

If a student has been rejected everywhere else, school might be the only place left where they can still feel connected to humanity.

We can't change society's
behavior, but if we make our
school a kinder place, it may
also become a safer place.

The groups we form
are like separate countries
at war with each other.

We attack each other
mercilessly, then wonder why
someone takes it to the next
level.

Think about it.

Some people will only take so much abuse before striking back.

If they're not physically strong enough to strike back openly, or if too many people are against them, they'll make secret plans and attack by surprise, using overwhelming force.

Fear of punishment can only stop a person from murder if they value their own life.

If school gossip and school bullies make a student so miserable that they don't care about their own life anymore, there's no way to stop them.

Someone who is determined and secretive, someone who doesn't care what happens to them, can't be prevented from committing violence.

They can only be taken down as quickly as possible once the violence has started.

The way to prevent violence is to make sure no one gets to the point of not caring anymore what happens to them.

This means we have to care what happens to them, and let them know it.

This means making sure every student feels connected.

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**The Opposite Of
Rejection**

Students feel connected
if someone listens to them.

The violent feelings inside a
person only build up and
explode into action if there
has been no other receptive
outlet, if there has been no
other way to get people to
truly pay attention.

Truly listening to someone gives them a chance to release feelings that have been building up inside.

Sometimes, just listening isn't enough; we may have to earn a troubled student's trust first, by joining in a favorite activity.

Listening is a skill.

There are six ways to become a better listener.

First, *be patient*:
give our undivided attention
and don't interrupt.

Second, *be sympathetic*:
try to understand their point
of view and don't judge.

Third, *stay focused*:
don't go off on a tangent and
don't talk about ourselves.

Fourth, *encourage thinking*:
don't give our own analysis
and don't give advice.

Fifth, *be trustworthy*:
don't repeat what we hear
unless it will prevent a crime.

Sixth, *honor feelings*:
let people laugh, cry, yawn,
shout, get angry or act afraid.

These are normal human
emotions. They are all okay.

Feelings have to be expressed, not held in until a person explodes.

While it's important to listen to others in a natural, informal way, it's also helpful to have an organized listening post available.

We can even call it "The Listening Post."

This is a place where students can drop in and know that someone will be there who will listen to them.

The listening post can be staffed by volunteers who agree to the six conditions of good listening we mentioned earlier.

A conflict resolution center can also be set up, to act as a mediator and to share information about how to settle arguments peacefully.

Students with ideas and experiences that have worked to prevent violence at their own school can post reports at a special website.

Sponsors can organize a “community day”, an “ethnic appreciation day” or a “getting to know people day” where people introduce their friends who don’t know each other and people who don’t normally talk to each other have a chance to break the ice.

This is how we can help.

Treat everyone with respect.

Disapprove of cruelty.

Reach out to students who
have been hurt.

Be a good listener.

Get to know the people in our
community.

This is what students can do
to prevent school shootings.





Michael Gerald Sheehan is a musician, composer, speaker and author. He lives near Portland, OR in the USA.

For more information about Michael, to contact him or listen to his music, please visit his website at:

www.michaelgeraldsheehan.com