

In our many efforts to prevent gun violence, I also believe we also need to promote peace. It is evident our society has become more divisive, angry, and mean spirited, which sadly, includes senseless gun violence. There are many causes of this, but rather than focusing on what people shouldn't do, I feel we also need to emphasize what people can do. I would like to begin with a couple of quotes.

"Peace starts within each one of us. When we have inner peace, we can be at peace with those around us. When our community is in a state of peace, it can share peace with neighboring communities, and so on. When we feel love and kindness towards others, it not only makes others feel loved and cared for, but it helps us also to develop inner happiness and peace." –The 14th Dalai Lama

"Nonviolence means avoiding not only external physical violence but also internal violence of spirit. You not only refuse to shoot a man but you refuse to hate him."
- Martin Luther King

If we wish to decrease violence in the community I would propose we need to work toward being more peaceful with each other. In this vein, I would suggest we need to start a campaign across the community that has at its foundation the concept of "Peace begins with me."

Within this perspective, nonviolence and peace making becomes a responsibility of everyone in the community and not only actions or plans directed toward this or that group of people. The focus on creating peace within ourselves can lead to interactions with our family members, friends, and strangers which are kinder, less angry, more tolerant, and supportive.

Some simple strategies which might support this initiative include:

1. Having a poster contest within schools across the area, reflecting "Peace begins with me."
2. Having a "Peace Walk(s)" across the community in which individuals make a commitment to seek inner peace, peaceful interactions, and peaceful living.
3. Create a peace awareness program, such as using billboards or ads, which promote peace awareness and/or alternatives to aggression/violence (e.g. conflict resolution).
4. Asking businesses to sell T-shirts perhaps an official T-shirt that states "Peace Begins with me." Shirts would be provided at cost, with any profit going toward programs or activities, which promote anti violence/peace.
5. Having a "Community Peace Day" and asking churches of all denominations, businesses, etc. to increase peace awareness.
6. To address gun violence specifically, we need to create messages which might give a person a pause before resorting to gun violence, e.g., "If you're angry enough to shoot someone, walk away, your family and theirs, will thank you."

I am confident there are many creative and compassionate people who will provide learning and awareness activities associated with a "Peace begins with me" campaign.

Thanks for your consideration, and also want to commend everyone for seeking to curb gun violence.

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