

# Adults and youth must work together to end bullying

Douglas A. Wain 12:08 p.m. ET May 19, 2017



(Photo: Provided)

*Douglas A. Wain is the executive director and CEO of YouthAlert!, a nonprofit organization dedicated to reducing youth violence and bullying through volunteerism and education.*

Our organization has just completed three straight years of doing our in-school violence and bullying prevention program in middle schools and high schools throughout the United States, reaching 9,436 youth. Data and statistics aside, we adults associated with the program learned quite a bit about youth and violence.

There is an old saying about violence: "People who do violence either don't know better or don't care." Our organization has now completely ruled out that kids don't care. The number one thing our organization has learned in our three years is that no matter what kids say or do, the reality is that they all have feelings. And when you multiply those feelings by 10, you might get close to a youth's reality.

We have also learned that youth are just as smart as adults. We adults just have more information through experience and education. When youth gain this education and these experiences through discussion and live role playing, we found that they instinctively learn to recognize true choices and that they almost always make the right true choices. In fact, most kids, by far, are already peaceful. Youth are already fully empowered with a unique individual internal identity which gives them the ability to make good true choices. We think a person's unique individual internal identity is who they really are. That's why we tell youth that all mirrors are liars. Mirrors are not special x-ray machines that can see the real you inside of you.

We think violence, bullying and abuse are the head of the snake. That they are the number one root cause of all human problems, including substance abuse, mental health issues, and yes, even human survival. I dare say we have not made great strides in all these other areas because we have not hit the nail on the head yet, which is fighting and dramatically reducing violence, bullying and abuse.

Homicide is the leading cause of death for African-Americans ages 10-24 years old. America has no greater asset than its black youth. That is because America has no greater asset than its youth. I believe that violence among our youth, compounded with the inequity of those at risk of violence, is the greatest problem facing America today. As adults, we must get more involved in what often looks like a youth-versus-youth war, here in America and around the world. We must free our youth from violence – all our youth. That is our imperative.

We think it's true when youth know better they do better, but we also believe that when adults know better we do better. There are so many proven ways to reduce violence and adults need to share more of this information with youth. Adults should not take it for granted when kids tell us what they think or feel. Many, many, kids will not share their feelings thoughts, opinions, beliefs, or dreams, nor do they have to. That is why I feel so honored when some youth, any youth, tells me anything. I now always take everything a youth says to me – good, bad, or indifferent – very, very, seriously.

Our organization thinks teamwork, adults and youth working together equally, is the solution to youth and adult violence, bullying and abuse. But we need to recognize equality and practice equity to get there. Yes, it takes a village, but it must be a fair and just village. For as another old saying goes, if you are not at the table, you are on the menu.

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