

When Not to Keep a Secret

Across America, violence is destroying the lives of teenagers, and tearing up close knit communities. In many of these instances, the reason the violence was not stopped is because a close friend of a participant decided to keep a secret that allowed violence to happen. When a friend confides that he or she is depressed, abused, or bullied, or if someone could get hurt from a secret, what is the use in not seeking help? It will only result in hurt one or more people. Instead of fostering violence by sitting idle, communities can help. By creating more places where children can come to confidentially talk about their problems, communities can help stop this epidemic. There are many situations in which a secret should not be kept, and ways for communities to help kids reveal their harmful secrets, and get on with life.

When I was thirteen, I had a friend who was very troubled. He was swamped with work, he had what he called “girl problems”, he was failing classes, and his parents were very hard on him. One day, he confided in me that he was in a deep depression, and that he was thinking about suicide. He also told me that if I were to tell anyone about this, he would never forgive me. I couldn’t just watch one of my best friends suffer and try to kill himself, so I decided to take action.

This teen, who I’ll call Ricky (not his real name), had many would consider a good life. He lived in a good neighborhood, had a good family, and was in a gifted and talented program. The pressure that it put on me was unbelievable. The previous night, I had considered the pros and cons of revealing his secret, and overwhelmingly decided to tell his mother. Ricky’s mom used to pick me up after school, and drive me home, as I lived very close to him. The day after he told me his secret, I could wait no longer. When Ricky was in the car, and his mom was outside, I approached his mother, and told her the entire story. She was shocked, and immediately drove Ricky to the crisis center. Ricky eventually got over his problems. Contrary to what he had said earlier about never forgiving me, Ricky was eternally grateful. His mother showered me with compliments and Ricky even once said, “you saved my life.” I can honestly say that my decision was the best it could possibly be.

Ever since the shootings in Columbine High School, and a rash of student suicides, America has been searching for ways to set up counseling for troubled teens. Schools use different techniques, but most of the time, they expect disturbed students to go to a counselor for help. Nine out of ten times, a child will not go to a counselor with their problems, but to a friend. The friend is told specifically to “keep the secret” and more often than not, they do, which leads to tragic consequences. For every school shooting that we hear in the news, there is usually at least one person who had known about it beforehand, and decided not to tell anyone. However, school shootings are not the only tragedies that occur. Suicide, exploitation, gang violence, and bullying are also problems that are kept under wraps. It is about time that the violence stopped.

For years, people and groups have been searching for ways to help distressed teens. The modern solution is to set up “safe houses” where teens can talk about their problems to trained professionals. However, I believe that centers should be set up in which friends of teens can come and confidentially talk about their friends’ problems. Hotlines along the same guidelines should be set up so those teens can talk about what their friends are going through without losing the friend for it. One of the main motivations for kids to keep harmful secrets that their friends have told them is that they are afraid that they will lose the friend. If confidentiality is a factor, then teens will be more likely to give up secrets about their friends. It is time that we put an end to teenage violence across the nation, and this is the way to do it.