

Restorative justice

Strengthening the Youth Criminal Justice Act is not the right approach.

I have the utmost sympathy for families and friends who have lost loved ones to youth violence.

As an educator who has worked with young people for many years, including most recently with incarcerated youth, I can also see the dilemma of youth violence from their perspective.

I make these suggestions:

► Our definition of youth:

Inherent to "youth" is the notion of limited rights and responsibilities. Youths cannot vote, buy alcohol or cigarettes or attend R-rated movies. If society wishes to try youths as adults, we must first reconsider our definition of "youth" and all its implications.

► Our social responsibility to youths:

Youths have had little or no input into the social structures and norms to which they are held accountable. Youths should be held responsible for their behaviour but society must also take some of the responsibility. Holding youths responsible does not demand punishment or imprisonment. Rather we should offer them guidance and support to make amends for their crimes and become productive citizens.

► Our ethical obligation to youths:

If we are all integrally interconnected — socially, ecologically or spiritually — then we have an ethical obligation to one another, including those who have victimized us. We must offer young people all that we can to help them meet their full potential. Punishment and retribution will perpetuate, not end violence.

► Restorative alternatives:

Restorative justice holds offenders directly responsible to their victims and the community through face-to-face meetings and dialogue. It nurtures love, forgiveness and hope, which we must teach our young.

Diane Conrad, Edmonton