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Teen Killing Sprees; Violence Begets Violence

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TEEN KILLING SPREES – The latest teen killing spree may be just the “tip of the iceberg,” says Judith Allik, a professor of psychology at the University of Dayton. “This is a wake-up call that our culture is ignoring the mental health of our children. It’s not necessarily a question of identifying children who need help, it’s one of taking a course of action and intervention when they are identified.”

Because this phenomenon is new, and common warning signs not yet identified, it is almost impossible to predict who will commit the next killing spree, says Allik, a clinical psychologist who specializes in child and adolescent behavior. “These are not your typical bullies who are physically violent to other students. So there is no pattern of behavior to observe. However, I would watch how they treat animals and children much younger than themselves. It’s a definite warning sign if they treat them cruelly.”

Allik recommends adults use their intuition when dealing with any troubled child, whether they believe the youngster is a threat to others or not. “Regardless of whether you think some children are capable of violent behavior or aren’t, make sure they get the help they need. Many children have identifiable, diagnosable and treatable problems – but we adults must help them.”

For media interviews, contact **Judith Allik** at (937) 229-2716.

VIOLENCE BEGETS VIOLENCE — The recent string of shootings by adolescents may well be a reflection of our violent society, says Alan Demmitt, assistant professor of counselor education and human services at the University of Dayton. “We’ve seen an escalation of violence in our society. Our society loves violence — we look at very real violence when we turn on the nightly news along with the things we see in the movies.”

A wavering sense of the value of life may also be contributing to serious adolescent crime, Demmitt says. “We don’t know where our society stands on the sanctity of human life, on abortion or euthanasia or mercy killings. We’re struggling with where we stand on these issues.”

He notes that the school shootings may have inspired “copy cat” crimes much as a single teen suicide can inspire a rash of suicides.

Can school counselors provide early warning of potential trouble? “Every time a levy fails, some of the first people to get cut are the counselors, along with the music teachers and art teachers,” Demmitt says. “So the number of school counselors is decreasing. When you’re down to a ratio of one counselor to 200 or 300 students, it’s difficult to attend to everything that’s going on.”

For media interviews, call **Alan Demmitt** at (937) 229-3608.

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