



By William Considine

December 2019

Modeling the Way

The Considine Report is focused on being a voice for all children and encouraging people to turn their words into actions. I will talk more about that in 2020 as we propose making the next 10 years the Decade of the Child. But before we get into the policy reforms needed to reverse the trends we're seeing regarding the health and well-being of children, I want to start the conversation by addressing something that is affecting children on a daily basis and doesn't cost a thing to remedy.

We all know that children need positive role models. Based on many recent troubling events and observations of our adult leaders, it's clear we as a society are falling short. Our children are bombarded with hateful words and displays of violence. On a daily basis, they witness acts of xenophobia, name-calling and bullying on social media and in the political arena.

The obvious question we must ask is this: Are we as individuals modeling the way for our children?

We have all witnessed how words can be used to divide us. The consequences of our toxic climate are becoming clearer every day, and our children are watching, listening and learning. Online bullying is on the rise among middle and high school students. Hate incidents are growing on college campuses. Children increasingly are subjected to abuse or harassment because of their race, religion, skin color, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity.

Earlier this year, the Harvard School of Public Health hosted a forum titled "The Spread of Hate and Racism: Confronting a Growing Public Crisis." Panelists raised concerns about what is happening in our schools, citing incidents of politically-charged bullying and increased rates of anxiety among marginalized students such as immigrants and religious minorities.

It's obvious that the words and actions of adults are contributing to this atmosphere of intolerance and fear. Young people who carry out these hateful acts are imitating what they see from adults. I can't help but think back to my youth, when parents, teachers, coaches and our adult leaders practiced civility and respect. They understood the importance of modeling the way.

My mother, Gene, who passed away in September at age 95, was a shining example. Mom had a way of finding the best in people. She never said a bad word about anyone. She had an enormous caring spirit, and she spread her loving, positive attitude to everyone. In my adult life, I've met many people who modeled the way, including children.

Those of us who believe in a civil society that respects the rights of all individuals must set the example for our children through our words and actions. Many organizations are committed to fostering diversity, equality and inclusion. In fact, dignity, respect, sharing and collaboration are the core concepts of family-centered care, which leads to better health care outcomes for patients.

It is our responsibility to establish a welcoming environment that shows respect for people of all cultures, backgrounds and beliefs. Let's consider our words and behavior to ensure they are sending the right message. Thoughtful interactions and performing daily acts of kindness are key elements of modeling the way for our children. We should all seek out opportunities to donate our time and support for youth organizations that help build positive character traits. There are many great examples including Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America, 4-H, Boys and Girls Clubs, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, Junior Achievement and many others dedicated to developing kids' interests in arts, music, sports and community service.

Let's all take our responsibility seriously as adults to model the behaviors we want our youth to follow and support the organizations that help them learn and grow. It's time to speak up with positive messages that bring people together and encourage children to become caring, productive members of their communities.

Modeling the way is the right message and now is the right time to start spreading it.



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