

Name-calling can have serious consequences

It was October. The crispness of fall was in the air. A tragedy was in the making. It happened like this:

A little girl of 10, for whatever reason, decided she didn't like one of her classmates, a little boy. He was big for his age but otherwise just an average-looking boy.

Every day, the little girl called the boy names. She called the boy the worst names she could think of. That went on day after day.

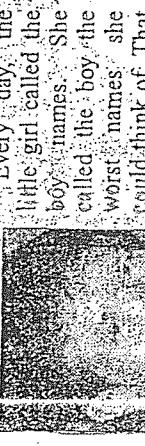
No one tried to stop it. In fact, the teachers didn't know that anything was wrong. After all, they would have to be looking for the signs of a problem, and they weren't.

In fact, no one was looking for any signs of a problem. Not the teachers, not the parents, not the other children. No one. It was considered great sport to torment the boy. Other children joined in. They laughed. But, again, no one noticed anything was wrong.

Everyone who could have done something — teachers, parents, or classmates —

There is and always will be an equal and opposite reaction for each and every action. It is true in physics and in relationships. Negative actions have negative consequences. And it is all so unnecessary.

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After weeks of torment, with his self-esteem shattered, the little boy struck back. He stopped riding the bus to escape the torture. Each day, he walked home.

On the last day, the little girl, for whatever reason, walked home the same way as the boy. And, again, she and her friends taunted the boy, calling him names, and saying he was ugly. On and on it went. Finally, the little boy, in tears, stopped, dropped his books and picked up a brick.

As the brick left his hand, he knew it would hit its mark. Seconds later, the little

Where was it written, "You are you brother's keeper"? Were the words as I recall? And what about, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you?" Folks, we have a problem. And if rage finds its way into our midst, it will be a result of our doing nothing.

The victim's instrument of retaliation — a brick, a rock, a knife, a gun, a baseball bat — isn't the issue. It never has been.

The issue is whether we have the resolve to protect basic human rights — such as life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness without fear of abuse. That is true no matter what age group we are considering.

Folks, rights have responsibilities. And the most important responsibility is the protection of those rights. It must begin at home. It must begin at school. It must begin within each of us.

We must see to it that each of us — and each child — learns the meaning of right and wrong, of what behavior is acceptable and what isn't. Abuse — mental, verbal or physical — has no place. The consequences are far too painful, far too costly.

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