

SPEAKER: Disarming 'defensive communication'

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are as varied as Hewlett Packard, Stanford University, Kaiser Permanente, the U.S. Department of Justice, the Center for Dispute Resolution in London, England, and a number of social-change organizations.

Whatever the situation, whether social, family, or business, our communication has been "shaped by our focus on defensive self-protection and power struggle. Because we use our words as weapons instead of constructive tools, we often communicate in a way that increases conflict instead of resolving it," according to Ellison.

Currently a resident of Sunriver, Ellison graduated from Milwaukie High School, where she was elected best debater. While at Willamette University in Salem she won the Dorey Oratory Contest and spent her junior year at the University of Stockholm. She later graduated from the University of Oregon with a masters in juvenile corrections.

Much of her early career was spent as a group worker, and field and intake counselor with juveniles in Marion and Lane counties. In the '70s she was involved with skill-building programs for at-risk teens, their parents, and teachers.

From 1975-1986 she was a counselor in private



Sharon Strang Ellison.

practice and a consultant to Children's Services Division and for Lane County teachers and administrators, as well as teaching communication classes through Lane Community College. In 1986-87, Ellison was a scholar-in-residence at St. John's University in Minnesota while she worked on her book, which was ultimately published in 1998.

"I started thinking about the ideas for my book when I was a child, and can find the developing theme in my high school and college papers," Ellison said in response to the question of how she developed her process for non-defensive communication.

"The feedback I'm getting from a wide range of people in the field of psychology — as well as other fields — is that the process I've developed is unique in that it works very effectively to prompt people to drop their defenses, often instantly," she said.

For more information visit www.pndc.com.

Commentary...

Orlando: What do you say to the kids?

By Edie Jones
Correspondent

All of us were shocked with horror at the killings in Orlando. Something few adults could ever imagine, much less our kids. What do you tell them? How do you explain something so unimaginable?

The first rule of thumb when something like this happens and they are aware of it is to tell the truth. Keep in mind what your kids are ready for and can understand. The fact that it was a "gay bar" is unimportant until a child is old enough to understand about homosexuality. The fact that a very unhappy person felt the only thing they could do was to create havoc, fear and great sadness is relevant.

If your children have watched the news or any of the coverage of this happening, they will have questions. Encourage questions and answer, to the best of your ability; try to explain what might lead someone to plan and carry out such attack.

Talk about mental illness, that it leads people to do strange and terrible things. Talk about the help people in this state of mind

can receive. And, emphasize how much you love them and want them to talk to you whenever they feel sad, frustrated, or unloved.

If your child is being bullied on the playground or in school, let them know that telling someone not only helps them, it also helps the person doing the bullying. By telling a teacher or parent, they are making it possible for the bully to get help in learning better ways to behave and make friends.

Also, talk about guns. If you are a gun-owner, share why you have them and what you do with them. Teach, teach, teach! This is a good time to emphasize safety and for what your gun should and should not be used.

If you believe there should be more gun laws, talk about the Second Amendment. Is it still valid and important? Talk about how legislation works and how bills become laws and the importance of following them.

This horrendous killing can be a very good "teachable moment" about why we have rules to govern us.

Monitor the T.V. programs and movies your kids watch. There is so much destruction to property and people in front of our eyes that we sometimes become oblivious to its content. Not necessarily for kids. They may get the impression that that is what happens in life and the Orlando killings just fit into the mix. Help them know what is fantasy and what is real. As horrible as it is, it is real and they need to know the difference.

Most of all emphasize that they don't need to fear the same thing happening here. Not that it could never happen, that it is very unlikely. And, again, assure them that you love them and will do everything in your power to keep them safe.

Kids move on quickly from this type of thing, if parents and caregivers handle it correctly.

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