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# EDITORIAL

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THANK YOU FOR READING THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

## Conflict Resolution Skills Taught To Children

By MIEKE BOMANN

While conflict resolution programs are introduced in high school to teach alternatives to violence, research increasingly points to the first five years in a child's life as the critical period for influencing social and emotional development.

"A lot of children's habits, the basic foundation for the ways they think and relate, are established in those first years," said Larry Dieringer, executive director of Educators for Social Responsibility, a Boston-based organization that has developed a conflict resolution program for the very young called Adventures in Peacemaking.

Lisa Cureton, a childcare director and teacher trainer in Maryland, said giving children the social and emotional tools to handle life's experiences is just as important as developing their intelligence.

Citing the two student suspects in the Littleton, Colo. High school killings, Cureton said they obviously had the intellectual ability to build the bombs and plan their attack. What they lacked was emotional intelligence.

"We work so diligently in giving our children cognitive intelligence but we are losing the battle as it relates to social and emotional development," Cureton said, referring to the work of Daniel Goleman and his book "Emotional Intelligence."

The Adventures in Peacemak-

ing program, which has been implemented in 600 after-school programs in 25 communities nationwide and has reached an estimated 16,000 children, aims to give children emotional coping skills at a young age, before they have developed a protective mask that is difficult to crack.

Geared for both pre-school children and schoolchildren through the sixth grade, the program is designed for after-school hours and emphasizes having fun. Activities like "The Lily Pad Hop," "Human Camera" and "Beat the Wave" teach cooperation, differing perspectives, and the effects of stereotyping. Youngsters learn to express their feelings, communicate with each other, respect differences in cultural background and work together.

"We can remove that hardening of the heart before that hardening even occurs," by giving children the skills to deal with their emotions, says Cureton.

"Then we've really done some work and can really make a change for tomorrow."

Positive reinforcement is another tool that seems to help turn around negative student behavior in the lower grades. A program called Give Peace a Chance in Nashville, Tenn., revolves around small efforts to reward students for good deeds. Positive notes from other children are stuffed into

Continued on the next column

## Snodgrass & Mannix Perpetuate Mabon Tactics

There is plenty of blame to go around for school shootings in Peal, Paducah, Jonesboro, Springfield, Littleton and Coyners. The easy availability of guns, Hollywood violence, Failure of friends schools and law enforcement officials, fellow students and family to recognize signs of trouble. The Internet. There may be another root cause: The role of the Lon Mabons of the world. Mabon, leader of the conservative religious group, Oregon Citizens Alliance, will of course deny he favors hatred or is a part of killing kids. But what his words and deeds do is foster trouble.

No, Mabon didn't call for the physical violence of school shootings. But he led a church-based election campaign to single out homosexuals and treat them as less than equal human beings. Twice in the 1990's Mabon put a supposed "moral authority" behind an emotionally violent message to youths that it is okay to target groups you don't like or disagree with.

It isn't difficult for adolescents

to take the underlying message to the next stage for physical violence against any group of humans. In Littleton the targets in the gun lens deliberately include a born-again Christian co-ed and Black athlete.

Mabon wouldn't get away with harassing gays with a gun so he used the other insidious tactic of emotional violence. Is it a coincidence that two of the school shootings happened in states where there have been anti-gay ballot campaigns earlier in this decade and most of the other shootings have been in conservative "Bible Belt" states where youth have had years of anti-gay teaching in church?

### Snodgrass: Dividing Oregon Again

Now Oregon Republic Reps. Lynn Snodgrass and Kevin Mannix are seeking to perpetuate the Mabon emotional violence tactic. Their Joint Resolution 29 is aimed at gays. They attempt to sanitize and hide their anti-gay bias by not including the word "homosexuality" in their ballot measure.

has changed for the better.

"We have a lot of challenging children and some behavior problems," Wright explained. "Those sorts of things are way down. The children have learned how to use anger management tools and how to use words in an appropriate way."

Change doesn't happen overnight and the program asks for a one-year commitment from participating after-school programs. But once the curriculum has had time to take hold, the effects are often remarkable, Cureton notes. After the first year, children in her program began to communicate

If sin is what they are against, note that they don't speak to ban marriage or benefits for "all sinners (period)." After all, the Bible is full of rules Snodgrass and Mannix violate. So the duo plays pick and choose with sins and point their trigger finger at groups they think they can easily dominate.

### Schoolyard Bullies

Just like schoolyard bullies Snodgrass and Mannix are picking a fight with someone they think they can beat. In the short term Snodgrass and Mannix will no matter what the election results are. They know sex sells and they can raise lots of money and energize their troops with a sex-related ballot issue.

However in the long run Oregon will be divided and after the election there will be straight, gay and bisexual members of society. Ironically, at the beginning of her term with the House Speaker, Snodgrass claimed she was tired of Oregon being divided between rural and urban areas. Yet she is

happy to lead a divisive campaign against a group she doesn't like.

Snodgrass, Mannix and Mabon should read Jeremiah 23 on their politics of division, which has turned people away from churches: Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! Says the Lord... it is you who have scattered my flock, and driven them away... Instead of dividing Oregon with yet another religious-based ballot campaign, Snodgrass and Mannix might try the positive tactic of evangelism. If they convince 99% of Oregonians to commit themselves to be practicing members of their conservative churches, the legislators wouldn't have to fear what they label "the gay agenda."

Instea, Joint Resolution 29 is a tactic admission by Snodgrass and Mannix that they are failing to convince Oregonians of their interpretations. So the legislators instead are seeking a secular law to impose their religious beliefs even on people of faith who find a different message in the Bible.

of lives."

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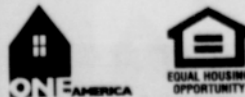
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