

PARENTS TALK BACK

'Warning: graphic video' — knowing your limits

I was trying to build up the emotional wherewithal to watch the latest police shooting video circulating the internet.



AISHA SULTAN Parents Talk Back

when random violence erupts in your immediate vicinity. Chaos and uncertainty are more destabilizing the closer they hit to home.

Police officers shot and killed Alton Sterling outside a Baton Rouge, Louisiana, convenience store. When such a shooting looks unprovoked and unwarranted, the viewer could be witnessing a murder, one unlikely to result in any kind of prosecution.

Later that day, I took baked goods to our neighbor who is a police officer to let him know we were praying for the officer and the department. I needed to feel a sense of community and show my children how people come together in tragedies.

But I wondered if my deliberate refusal to watch these events unfold undermined my desire to be part of the solution. I asked Vetta Sanders Thompson, a clinical psychologist and professor at the Brown School of Social Work at Washington University. She said it is important to be informed when wanting to have an honest conversation about what policing looks like in our society for all people. But also that no one should risk their mental health or well being.

"You have to take care of yourself," she said. "And other people don't know your limits."

I was trying to convince myself that it was necessary to be a witness to such incidents happening by a police force for which we collectively pay. Before I could click play, a suburban St. Paul, Minnesota, police officer killed Philando Castile during a traffic stop. Castile's girlfriend documented the aftermath through a video that spread through social media.

Multiple exposures to such scenes of violence carry additional stress for people who are more vulnerable, she said. That includes people with a history of trauma, such as a sexual assault history, combat experience, a chronic stressor or health issue, or those living in a home or community with significant violence. These videos can make you feel more unsafe in the world than is necessary, she said.

Again, I couldn't watch. I read the words her 4-year-old daughter said to her mother, who was taken into police custody after seeing her boyfriend shot to death: "It's OK, Mommy. I'm right here with you."

I could hear a 4-year-old's voice.

My internal debate continued. When a system seems so entrenched and resistant to change, you should be a witness when it fails, I thought. Watching such footage should make us more upset, scared and hurt. We can channel those emotions to try to raise children with more empathy and compassion for all people. We can flash back to those images when we need courage to challenge a racist comment made in our presence.

Her comments made me think more deeply about why the thought of watching the videos provoked such anxiety for me. I have been up close to human tragedy in my years as a news reporter. I've covered countless funerals of victims of violence, and talked to families in their moments of raw grief. Those experiences take an emotional toll, but they don't feel traumatizing for me.

While brutality and injustice have existed as long as humanity, the video documentation and its instant spread are relatively new.

I had nearly convinced myself to watch both videos when a sniper shot and killed five police officers in Dallas at a protest in response to the shootings.

There were two incidents in my early 20s, however, that hit close to home. My best friend from high school was shot and murdered at her college in Texas by a fellow student. Six years later, my aunt in Pakistan was murdered, shot point-blank, by an intruder. In the case of my friend, a beautiful girl from an affluent family, justice was swift. Her killer was convicted and executed. My aunt's killer was never found. The Pakistani police hardly investigated her case. It was extremely low priority: She was a politically unconnected, ordinary, stay-at-home mom.

More victims, more grief, more anger. We were still reeling from this attack when another police officer was shot. This time it was a routine traffic stop in my own suburban St. Louis neighborhood. My children were playing outside when I saw the news. I called them inside and closed the garage door. I could hear news helicopters overhead.

Their deaths impacted me in ways others had not. Though I don't think of either of them when I see reports of mass shootings or gunshot victims, they

At the time, we didn't know the condition of the officer or whether the suspect had been caught. (Ballwin Officer Michael Flamion suffered life-altering injuries and will need long-term care. Antonio Taylor faces felony charges after reportedly shooting him in the neck from the back.)

It feels different

affected how I perceive justice in the world.

Emotions connected to traumatic life events can lie dormant below the surface. Memories lurk in our subconscious.

Once I realized that watching real-life violence likely touched those same buttons, I gave myself permission to scroll past the posts that said "Warning: Graphic Video."

But I will amplify the message: We must do better.

Aisha Sultan is a St. Louis-based journalist who studies parenting in the digital age while trying to keep up with her tech-savvy children. Find her on Twitter: @AishaS.

Trump postpones VP announcement

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump abruptly postponed plans to announce his vice presidential pick following a day of rampant speculation, citing the "horrible attack" in France, that left scores dead.

Trump had planned to hold his first event with his yet-to-be-named running mate Friday in New York. He announced the change of plans Thursday evening on Twitter.

The stunning announcement raised questions about the status of Trump's selection process. Indiana Gov. Mike Pence had emerged as a late favorite for the job, though Trump said he had not finalized the pick and advisers cautioned he could change his mind.

"I haven't made my

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final, final decision," Trump said on Fox News Channel. He said that while his running mate selection would "absolutely not" be changed by the France attack, he did not feel it was appropriate to hold a news conference in its aftermath.

In addition to Pence, Trump's vice presidential shortlist included former House Speaker Newt Gingrich and New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, according to people familiar with the candidate's thinking.

Tim Tebow: Speaking slot at Trump convention 'a rumor'

CLEVELAND (AP) — Thursday morning he was among the biggest stars featured on Donald Trump's convention lineup. Thursday night, Tim Tebow

declared his attendance at next week's Republican National Convention was nothing more than "a rumor."

The Trump campaign did not immediately respond to questions about Tebow's departure from a convention program that the New York billionaire's team had long teased would be an extraordinary display of political entertainment. But instead of sports stars and celebrities, as promised, the campaign is relying heavily on the party's establishment for the four-day convention, which begins Monday.

The presumptive presidential nominee has approved a convention program that features at least 20 current or former elected officials, including Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, House Speaker Paul Ryan and Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, a primary rival.

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