

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE
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Gun Violence A Mental Health Crisis for Youth

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Mr. Koppel: I'll tell you what, before we have our panelists introduce themselves, and I'd like them to do that, we're gonna watch a video. It is a stark reminder of what happened on, of all days, Valentine's Day earlier this year, 14th of February, 17 people killed, 17 people badly injured. Let's take a look at the video first.

Speaker 2: We're the first generation to just grow up with code red drills.

Speaker 3: We're from Parkland, from Chicago, from all across America and we've had enough.

Speaker 2: We didn't sign up for war. We're just students. We just wanna go to class and get our education.

Keshawn: My name's [Keshawn 00:01:27] and I'm the president of Tech Student Council. After college, I planned on being an architect.

Speaker 5: I'm a proud mom of Keshawn. He's very outspoken and determined. That's what I love about him.

Kayla: My name is Kayla and I'm in 11th grade.

Liv: I'm Liv. Kayla and I have been friends since 9th grade. I love skateboarding and I love the beach.

Kayla: I make a lot of jokes. They're like really cheesy jokes, and Olivia laughs at everything.

Keshawn: Play a lot of card games here. I think last time you won because you got lucky. my brother [inaudible 00:02:05] good musician and get his message out there. He tried to find the best in whatever he did.

Kayla: My parents surprised me in the kitchen with like birthday banners and presents on the table and stuff.

Liv: It just felt like a great day. There's everybody with their teddy bears, and their chocolates, and their balloons. It was a happy environment.

Kayla: After lunchtime we went into the freshman building because that's where my AP Psychology class is and we were just waiting for our teacher and then she finally came and unlocked the door.

Liv: I had missed a math test that I was going to make up. The building that I was in is parallel to the freshman building. I was sitting right by the window taking a test and all of a sudden I heard like the cracking of a whip.

Speaker 8: I just got a horrific piece of news, authorities are responding to reports of an active shooter at a high school.

Kayla: It was like loud popping noises. Like a firework.

Speaker 5: I grew up in an area you heard gunshots, you hear helicopters, it's crazy. It makes you like afraid to go outside, but at the same token you still have to live your life and just pray every day that you make it back home safe.

Keshawn: My brother had left out that night to take his girlfriend to the bus stop, so she could get home safely and as he was coming back he seen his friends, and as they started to walk off there was a shootout.

Speaker 9: Nice meeting you. Nice to meet you.

Liv: I'm good.

Speaker 10: Now is the time to come together. Be bold, be courageous. The nation's counting on you.

Speaker 11: We don't have a number of possible injuries or fatalities.

Liv: My mom called me on the phone and she starts whispering to me and she goes, "Just let me know you're safe", and I turned to my friend and I said, "This is real." These girls start hysterical crying. I'm trying to calm everybody down. Kayla, she calls me and she goes, "Oh my gosh, are you okay? Are you out?" I said, "No." I could just tell her voice was like, "Oh."

Speaker 11: At least 14 people injured. There are fatalities.

Kayla: We hear like three shots and we all drop down, and we all run to the opposite side of the classroom. We were all squished behind the desk.

Speaker 12: Another bloody weekend in the Windy City, leaving one man dead and another 18 wounded.

Speaker 5: Soon as he turned the corner he was caught in gun fire, and he got shot nine times.

Speaker 11: An active shooter situation in Florida right now.

Liv: I was in the closet for about two, maybe two and a half hours. I asked, I was like, "Please don't make noise", because I knew it was crucial that we were silent.

- Kayla: He shot through the glass in the door and he shot four kids in my class and you could see the glass on the floor. I heard their cries and wheezing. There were people crying, there were people calling their moms, and some people were shushing the victims who were shot.
- Speaker 5: The auntie called and was like, "Where is [Puda 00:05:56]", and Puda is Randall's nickname, "Where is Puda", and we like, "He in the room." Then she was like, "Go check in the room because I'm looking at him on the ground right now as we speak." When we got to the scene that was him on the ground dead. No one wants to see their child dead on the ground in a pool of blood.
- Keshawn: We also have to watch our backs, it's just a fear factor for everyone living inside of Chicago. I'm just here to let everyone know the daily struggle that we have to go through.
- Speaker 13: There will be counselors there, there will be food there, nobody on this trip has to suffer through anything, and that's really important that you understand that.
- Speaker 2: You never think it's gonna be your school. You never think it's gonna be your best friend's school.
- Speaker 5: When is enough enough, you know?
- Speaker 2: The more Congress and politicians don't do anything about it the more rallies we have, the more angry the people are gonna get because we're tired of seeing this.
- Speaker 14: This is the beginning of the end and from here we fight. It is time to fight for our lives, so we will register, we will educate, and then when it comes down to it we will vote.
- Speaker 13: Fight, fight, fight.
- Keshawn: I was 13 years old when I lost my brother forever. No one should ever have to go through losing a loved one.
- Kayla: I hope for all future generations that they never have to go through anything like we went through.
- Mr. Koppel: Pretty gripping, huh? In case they can't identify you from the video, please identify yourselves. Three out of four of you tell me how old you are now.
- Kayla: I'm Kayla. I'm a rising senior at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.

Liv: I'm Liv. I'm an uprising junior at Marjory Stoneman Douglas and I'm 16 years old.

Keshawn: I'm Keshawn. I'm 16 years old and attend Perspective Charter School.

Ann Thomas: I'm Ann Thomas. I'm the President/CEO of The Children's Place, which is an agency in Kansas City, Missouri, that works with children who've experienced multiple traumatic events.

Mr. Koppel: Ann, why don't you start us off, what do you think, if anything, was positive that has come out of the aftermath?

Ann Thomas: These things are terribly hard. As you say in the video, it starts to happen more and more and we never wanna be desensitized to something like this and yet every single time it happens it elevates a conversation. It shouldn't have to take this many times to elevate a conversation, but it has. It is an opportunity for us to start saying let's not just treat all the symptoms off of this, let's really start to understand what's going on. I think it's an opportunity for us to say, "How did we get here", and it's not just one answer. One thing is not gonna fix this, but it's not okay. This is not the world any of us want our children to live in and I think it's time we start talking about how do we keep children safe, how do we keep people safe, and how do we navigate issues related to mental health.

Mr. Koppel: Let me ask, and any one of you can answer this, other than preaching to the choir, other than convincing people who were already inclined to believe that there is too much gun violence and that something finally has to be done, do you think you have convinced anybody else? Do you think what happened on February 14th made a difference? Does the continuing gun violence in Chicago, and I want you while the two of them answer ... you got your iPhone with you?

Keshawn: Yes.

Mr. Koppel: Take it out and pull out that app that you have. Ladies?

Liv: I think the movement that we have started it might not change the opinion of some of the people who are against what we're trying to fight for, but I think it may make them think more about the situation and I do believe that we have changed many people's beliefs on gun control and reform and stuff, but this is just a small part of the movement that we've begun and so it'll take time, but eventually we will start to influence more people.

Mr. Koppel: You understand what I'm saying, from the vantage point of news coverage, for example, my colleagues and I tend to be folks who can only really focus on one major crisis at a time. Yes, the newspapers are filled with a lot of other stories, but we have one obsession at a time. Right now the obsession is what is

happening to those Central America and Latin American immigrants and their children being separated at the border. I'm asking whether you have any sense that the moment may have come and gone already?

Kayla: I don't think our voices will ever run out. We're still always gonna be here and we're still gonna fight. We're still here tonight. We're never gonna give up the fight, even if the news goes away, even if no one's paying attention to us, we're still gonna demand attention no matter what.

Mr. Koppel: Tell us what's on your app. Explain what the app is.

Keshawn: This website actually. Would you like to say the name of it because it has a bad word. The name of the website.

Mr. Koppel: Well, it looks as though the name of the website is Hey Jackass.

Keshawn: Yeah.

Mr. Koppel: Is there a particular reason why you wanted me to read that?

Keshawn: That's just the name of the ... I had no ...

Mr. Koppel: Go for it. It's actually a very serious app.

Keshawn: Yeah, it gives you the statistics of Chicago shootings and the death of Chicago, how many people have been shot within a week, within this month, and within this year. It also gives you more detailed statistics about how many times they've been shot, where they've been shot, and gives you more detailed locations of where it's been-

Mr. Koppel: Update us. What are the latest stats?

Keshawn: In Chicago this year 1,273 people have been shot and 206 have been killed of that 1,273. There has been 248 homicides as well. That's just from this year.

Mr. Koppel: How many people in the last month?

Keshawn: In the last month, from June 1st to now there's been 224 people that's been shot and 36 people have been killed, and 43 homicides.

Mr. Koppel: There is something that you told me when we met earlier that really struck me. We're gonna be talking about how what happened at Stoneman Douglas may have made some of you and your classmates afraid to go to school, and people are talking about fear of going to school because of these shootings. You on the

other hand are saying, "Hey, wait a second, in Chicago school is the safest place we got."

Keshawn: Yes.

Mr. Koppel: Because?

Keshawn: School's actually the safest place, but in our community, outside, like where we live at that's kind of the struggle of safety that we have to really prepare ourselves for when we leave out. Gotta make sure that we don't go to certain places because it may be shootings here or violence in this area. There's a lot of factors that we have to deal with on a day-to-day basis.

Mr. Koppel: That was your brother who was killed?

Keshawn: It was, yes.

Mr. Koppel: Did you ever find out who did it and why?

Keshawn: No. We've actually still been searching for his killer. It's been over two years now and his case has still not been solved.

Mr. Koppel: Talk a little bit about the fear of going to school.

Kayla: For example, I was in that building and just going to school and hearing a book drop from like a next door classroom you just look around, you look immediately out the door to see if anyone's over there, and when you walk in the hallway you look around to see if anyone's looking suspicious. You're just more aware than you used to be. That's good in a way because we need to be more aware, but also we shouldn't be afraid to go to school.

Mr. Koppel: No, you shouldn't. Are you personally afraid to go to school?

Kayla: I'm not, but school does give me anxiety.

Mr. Koppel: Talk about that.

Kayla: It's just around the end of the day because that's when it happened. I like to go home early because I don't like stay there because I'm always scared that something's gonna happen again. There's always that fear in the back of my head. In the classroom, the same class I was in, we aren't in that class anymore, we were relocated, but still with those people you never know.

Mr. Koppel: Did you use to stay for after-class activities?

Kayla: Yeah.

Mr. Koppel: You don't anymore?

Kayla: No.

Mr. Koppel: How about you?

Liv: Me as well, I used to stay after school, but I don't anymore. I would say going to school it doesn't scare me. It's just, like she said, it gives me anxiety and the day that it happened I had gone to my math class to make up a test, and so I didn't know any of the people in that room. After the event had happened I'd like miss a day and I had to go make up another test in the same room with the same people and I procrastinated because I was so terrified to go back with the same people at the same time doing the same thing. It's just certain things kinda trigger different emotions. Like she said, loud noises and stuff. It's not even just a fear of going to school, this has made me afraid to go anywhere. It's just I don't have that feeling of safety anymore.

Mr. Koppel: Talk to me about the general feelings of youngsters around the country in schools where nothing has happened. Are you seeing any evidence of children being afraid because of what happened in Parkland?

Ann Thomas: Absolutely. Anxiety is a highly contagious emotion. It's very easy to share it and to feel it and to understand, we've all felt anxious at times, and then you think about these kind of events and I do ... I work with children and I hear them, again, children know what code red drills are. At our agency, we're teaching 4 year olds what it means to have a quiet drill. It's scary. In our sense of trying to protect we are causing more anxiety about these issues and we're adding to this fear. What's interesting in these is these are two very different examples of trauma caused because of guns. You have community violence, so everywhere you go is a toxic stress and the concern that what if it could happen here versus what we call a single incident. You can see the impact that both have, and that's transferable.

Mr. Koppel: When you talk about we're, you said, contributing to it, causing it, the anxiety, who's we?

Ann Thomas: We.

Mr. Koppel: Well, I mean come on, we can be a little more ... let me help you, how about "we" in the media, we who focus on stories like this after an incident like this, day after day, hour after hour, there's nothing but ... that's got to add to the anxiety.

Ann Thomas: It does.

Mr. Koppel: That's got to add to the fear, but let me put the question to you, you're trying to make political changes, right?

Kayla: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mr. Koppel: You still believe you can do it?

Kayla: Yes.

Liv: Yes.

Mr. Koppel: Tell me how and tell me why.

Kayla: We start by taking baby steps and we build up and up until we get an impact, even if it's little, it still takes time. All great changes, a lot of the social movements started with teenagers and we're a little younger than they are, but it took them years to build up where they are and to resolve a problem.

Mr. Koppel: Give me a for instance.

Kayla: The civil rights era.

Mr. Koppel: Teenagers?

Kayla: They were like in their 20s and-

Mr. Koppel: Yeah, right.

Kayla: We're a little younger.

Mr. Koppel: College students.

Kayla: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mr. Koppel: Certainly the freedom writers, they were people who were a few years older than the three of you. Yes, they certainly contributed to it. They certainly made a big difference. Who are the adults that you feel get it? Who are the adults who are gonna be able to translate what you're doing into ... what are you trying to achieve, new legislation?

Liv: I think the people that we're trying to reach out to the most are the adults who are voting, by informing them on the situation that's occurring in society. They're

the people who are allowed to vote. We cannot vote, but we can share our stories to show them that there is a need for change and we can push them to go vote and become more educated on people who are running in certain elections, so that we have the right people in office who will help us with the movement and make the change.

Mr. Koppel: Do you have a sense of what you want to accomplish though? What do you want them to vote on or against or for?

Liv: Well, one of the things that is miscommunicated a lot is that people think that we're trying to take guns away period, but we're not. We're trying to have restrictions, so that guns are in the hands of the right people and so that we live in a safer world. We want people who are voting to vote for different gun laws, not taking guns away.

Mr. Koppel: Okay. Who are the people that you wanna take guns away from?

Liv: Well, people who have a background history of being arrested. Before you get a gun you have to do a background check, so if you don't pass it then you shouldn't be able to get a gun. There's been issues with people not having background checks and being able to obtain a gun and people with different mental illnesses who shouldn't be able to have a gun as well. There needs to be an evaluation.

Mr. Koppel: You're the professional in that area. How tough is that gonna be?

Ann Thomas: I think it's hard. I mean we don't disagree that when we hear these stories the provocative part of this is when you listen to the stories of those that have done the shooting, they've had multiple traumatic events and yet we heal from some of them, and so learning how to decipher have you healed and you're safe and you're not becomes a judgment at times. It's best interest. That creates-

Mr. Koppel: No, I'm sorry, refresh my memory, the shooter in Parkland he took a weapon that was in the home. Was it his weapon?

Kayla: Yes.

Mr. Koppel: He owned the weapon?

Kayla: Yes, it was legal.

Mr. Koppel: Right, but there have been other incidents where the shooters have just taken their father's gun or their mother's gun, right?

Kayla: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mr. Koppel: How do you resolve that?

Kayla: You make sure they're locked away. You don't keep them out. You make sure that they're in a safe that your child does not know the lock number. Even if the kid knows where it is then you make sure that they're aware that it's not okay to take the gun and make sure that they know its your gun.

Mr. Koppel: Keshawn, you wanted to get into this a moment ago.

Keshawn: I did. I wanna actually speak upon voting. The group that I'm part of BRAVE, Bold Resistance Against Violence Everywhere, we're actually trying to educate the youth, anyone 18 or under, about getting out there to vote, register to vote so that we can have higher numbers of voters out here and not as little numbers we had from the past. That's something that we're educating them to do, so that they know that they have a voice to go out there to vote. More information actually could be viewed upon chistrong.org. That's what I wanted to ...

Mr. Koppel: Let's talk about something that we discussed this afternoon when we got together. I totally understand your sense of anxiety at your school after what happened there, no question, but other kids in other schools where there hasn't been the violence, and what I raise with you all is we have 37,000 people a year who die on our highways, why isn't there a similar anxiety about driving?

Kayla: I think it's a choice to get in the car and, obviously, you're taking chances, but there have been accidents, there have been drunk drivers, there's been moms picking up the actions, they're been taking little step by little step and finally now on the roads there's you're driving the wrong way signs, and there's blinking, and there's more things put in place. That's what we kinda wanna do, we wanna put things in place and maybe it'll lead up to a bigger thing.

Keshawn: Actually, people that's driving they actually have a choice to get inside the car to go out onto the highway and things of that sort, but the trauma that we experience is something that we have to deal with on a daily that we can't really steer away from because it's a part of our everyday life. Like them going to school gotta get an education and it's me just living life inside of my community. We're not able to avoid where we're at.

Mr. Koppel: Well, I take your point. You have to go to school. Some people don't have to drive, but most people in this day and age if they're driving they have to.

Keshawn: Yeah.

Mr. Koppel: They have to go to work. Some people if there's no school bus and they're old enough to drive, particularly in rural areas, in western states, great distances, they have to drive. I'm just wondering why something that causes infinitely more fatalities than gun violence in schools doesn't cause the same level of anxiety. Any thoughts on that?

Ann Thomas: I have a couple thoughts on that. Again, what they're starting and what has been started is just like driving, before there were seatbelts, I mean how many of you had car seats for your children? It's changed over time. Our culture of safety has changed and this concept that we do things to protect ourselves, that's what we should do, we should put seatbelts on, and you're right people die, lots of people are in cars, but we learned how to protect ourselves. Right now it feels like there's a vulnerability in our society. It feels like there's an access to something that's hurting people and children are getting it and turning it against each other. That is where this kind of paradigm shift has to occur of how do we keep people safe.

Mr. Koppel: I'm not sure I understand that.

Ann Thomas: Okay.

Mr. Koppel: What's happening that children are turning against each other?

Ann Thomas: They have access to guns, and what we're seeing is we now have this idea that if you're upset you can retaliate, if you are hurting you can do something about it and not cope with it, but the anger and the intensity of the emotions when you've been hurt is strong and our society now has seen that there's something you can do with it. You can hurt others and maybe that'll bring attention, that will bring a sense of relief and I think it's this point in our society saying how do we protect each other, how do we help those that have been hurt, and how do we keep others safe.

Mr. Koppel: What are some of the answers that you would propose. I'm asking you, Ann?

Ann Thomas: Me?

Mr. Koppel: Yeah.

Ann Thomas: I will come back with the idea that if we don't begin to change the conversation around teaching each other about mental health, instead of what's wrong with someone it's what's happening. It's not mental illness, we all strive to have good mental health. This is what you do to be healthy. We eat, we sleep, we learn all of this all the time. This conversation around how to develop health social emotional skills, how to have healthy relationships, we only talk about this after

these tragedies, and then it's like what are we doing. If we wanna be preventative we change our vernacular now. We start young and saying how do we help each other.

Mr. Koppel: I worry about the law of unintended consequences. Some of you here are old enough to remember what in those days was still called a lunatic asylum called Willowbrook. Geraldo Rivera actually became famous because he managed to get himself admitted to Willowbrook with a camera. He was able to bring a small camera in. The consequences of the stories that Geraldo did on Willowbrook was so enormous that asylums were closed all over America because the conditions were so horrible. The end result was that we multiplied the number of homeless people on the streets. I worry when you talk about we're gonna take the guns away from whom? Are we gonna start going around from community to community doing mental checks to see whether people ... I mean we've got 300 million guns in this country. In states like Colorado, western states, the idea of taking guns away from people who use them really for their protection, for their livelihood, they go out they shoot the food they're gonna be eating over the winter.

Ann Thomas: I don't think that the conversation is taking guns away. I think the conversation is how do we keep people more save, and maybe one of you wanna add to that. It's now there's an awareness that these things are out there and this is what's happening when have access to it.

Mr. Koppel: You're right, the conversation is not taking the guns away. The conversation was making sure that people whose actions with a gun might be suspect not have access to the gun and I'm asking you how do we do that? It's easier said than done isn't it?

Ann Thomas: It's very difficult. It's the same conversation we have with how do you keep someone that's had too many drinks from getting behind the wheel. We educate, we expand the knowledge, we put safeties in check so that you don't have a bump stock that you can shoot multiple people at once, I mean there are certain things we can do to provide some protection likened to a seatbelt. We can also begin to expand the conversation of can we recognize when someone is very depressed? Can we recognize when someone is having suicidal or homicidal thoughts? What leads to that and how can all of us as teachers, and news reporters, and peers, and anyone that reacts and interacts with people how do we recognize these signs? Then together collectively over time do we see our culture become different?

Mr. Koppel: It's hard to believe, but it's only been four months. How long is this going to be a passion of yours?

Liv: I definitely think it's something that I'll be fighting for until I see ... well, probably forever. It's gonna take several years to implement change. It doesn't happen overnight. It isn't gonna happen within the next few months. It's gonna be something that's hard. I don't think it's gonna be a problem that is solved any time soon, but I think that there are things that may occur that will help prevent it from happening again. I'll keep fighting until I see the change that I want to be made happen.

Mr. Koppel: How much of your time do you spend now? All three of you

Keshawn: Spent just fighting?

Mr. Koppel: Yeah.

Keshawn: Well, honestly, my whole summer is based upon things of this sort, getting awareness out to Chicago so that I can see a difference. Actually, in Chicago there's been plenty of people or organizations that's been doing this for a lot longer than anyone would know. We will keep on fighting honestly until we see the change that we just see. Some of that change won't always be shown, but we will be fighting. Me, I'm gonna keep on fighting until I can see a change inside of my city. One thing that I do wanna point out, Chicago can't have a change unless we can see places like Indiana being changed with their loose gun laws.

Mr. Koppel: Yeah. That's a point I want you to underscore because gun laws in Illinois are very tough.

Keshawn: Yeah.

Mr. Koppel: Gun laws in Chicago very tough, but in neighboring Indiana they're not. All anybody has ... the same thing is true where I live in Maryland, in D.C. the gun laws are extremely strict. In Virginia they're not. All you have to do is cross one of half a dozen different bridges to get over to Virginia you can buy a gun and drive back to D.C. What's the answer? Do you know?

Keshawn: I believe that everything that everyone's gone through we have a similar problem, so it's a national problem. This national problem deserves a national solution. We can't pick and choose the places.

Mr. Koppel: Okay. I'm just gonna make an arbitrary decision because I suspect that we've got a lot of questions out there. Who's got the microphone?

Speaker 16: One on this side and one on that side.

Mr. Koppel: One on this side, one on that side. We've got a couple of hands up here in the front row.

Speaker 17: Thank you. I want to express what I feel is obvious and that is we are all so proud of these three kids. They are not Millennials, they are Generation Z. They were born after 1995. By 2020, 22 million Generation Z will be eligible to vote. I'm chair of an organization called Inspire U.S., which is a nonprofit charitable organization, now in 10 states, which has registered 50,000 Generation Z high school seniors because high school seniors are going to be able to teach this country what it takes to make schools safe. It's their leadership that we're so proud of and now we have to expand that voting age to where those 22 million Generation Z will be a strong influence on the election of the President of the United States in 2020.

Mr. Koppel: Good for you.

Speaker 18: I'll echo that I'm incredibly proud and honored to be in your presence and I hope that you continue to stay the strong path of fighting for what you believe in. I'm a mother of a 16, 14 and 12-year-old, and I hope that they have the character that you have and the strength that you do. If you were to dream the dream, if someone said to you, "You get right now to write down what sensible gun legislation looks like", so that we could have safe schools and guarantee that we say goodbye to our kids in the morning and know that we're gonna see them again in the afternoon, what might that look like? I know we can't say, even though I'm from Tennessee, born in California, and would love to say, "Why do we even need guns at all", I know that's not realistic, I know I believe that that would be a great idea, I think it's part of a whole different greed of America, but we know that's not realistic.

What does it look like, in your minds, because you're the ones who are gonna define it for us, I believe that you will because I think the generation that came before you has failed you, and you are our promise and hope, so what does that look like for you guys?

Liv: I'd probably say that, to me, nobody under the age of 21 should be able to own a weapon. I think that normal citizens should not be able to obtain military-grade weapons, and I'd also say that we need to have tighter background checks and better mental health screenings to make sure that whatever guns are given out aren't in the hands of the wrong people.

Mr. Koppel: We have another microphone over here. I see a hand over here. Yes, ma'am, go ahead.

Speaker 19: Hi. I have a question for Ann. You mentioned the sort of traumas that lead to people being in a place where they make these decisions and they commit these horrible crimes. How can we prevent those kind of traumas from happening in their lives in the first place in order to try and maybe get to the root of that?

Ann Thomas: Trauma's unpredictable, so we don't always know. It could be the loss of a parent and a child didn't have anyone else that could serve as a guiding support, protective person to move through that grief process and the anger and the intensity of that emotion. We see a lot of people start to go numb when things hurt so much and they will hurt themselves to feel again or sometimes hurt others. We know child abuse, when you have been made helpless, when someone has been powerful over you the reaction to heal is "I need control". We try to find healthy ways to help people have control, but picking up a gun is a powerful way to have control and to not be a victim again. That goes with all forms of abuse. When you've been made to feel helpless the way our bodies wanna respond is to have control again and that can look different ways.

Speaker 20: The question is for Mr. [Koppel 00:43:14].

Mr. Koppel: Yes, sir.

Speaker 20: You mentioned the media obsession and how it affects the anxiety of these students. Can you comment on the media obsession and how it might affect shooters and their motivation to do what they do?

Mr. Koppel: Before I address that question, let me do a little test, I'm gonna need you all to participate. How many of you in this room, if you would indicate by a show of hands, listen on a more or less regular basis to Rush Limbaugh? That's what I thought. You see, part of the problem here is we're convincing one another you are a ready-made audience for these wonderful young people, you were prepared to be responsive to them before you ever walked in here, and as we have learned to our everlasting grief, I suspect, the country is seriously divided these days. We are talking about a nation, which is getting two different, I mean two totally different messages on the issues of gun violence.

Part of what I'm saying is that even those media that are inclined to support many of the measures that the panel here would like to see implemented, by just sort of flooding the airwaves with coverage after a mass shooting it brings out the worst in people and here I defer to Ann, but I think it brings out the worst in people who are harboring some sort of need to act in a violent way. Would you agree or disagree?

Ann Thomas: I think it provides a clear solution. From a therapeutic standpoint, I tell families, and especially families with children that have had trauma turn off the news.

You're not helping. That is not leading to positive mental health. For a victim, the part that I struggle with is when someone's been a victim they need control and they need someone to witness their story, so they can heal. There's gotta be a way the sense that you can bring light to their stories and to give them a voice when they've been made to feel helpless that's the power of media, that's where it works, but yes you have this constant dichotomy all of the time of who's it helping most.

Mr. Koppel: We have several questions on this side.

Speaker 16: To back here as well.

Speaker 21: Hi, thank you. You guys are amazing. We're from Kansas City, we appreciate what you do so much. One of the things that we're talking about these kids that have gone through obviously what you've gone through, but the kid who was the shooter and how many times he was reported at school, through the police, and what can we do as a community starting when our children are very young to be kind and loving and identify those kids that are marginalized? I know I'm not a professional, and I have three children, but finding love and kindness to help and identify if you see someone who is hurting to reach out to them. I think that can have a big impact. I wonder if someone would've stopped this kid who obviously had been so troubled, could've stopped this situation. Thank you.

Mr. Koppel: Alright. I'm being told that we're down to our last five minutes. If you can keep the question short, let's see if we can get three questions in.

Speaker 22: Hi. My name is Liliana Flanagan. I'm here with three other students. We're a part of Grand Valley Students United in Western Colorado. We formed shortly after February 14th. We do live in a very conservative area and we formed as a progressive coalition of students trying to stop things like gun violence, have funding for education, and we've been lucky enough to have support in our community, but we do have a lot of mental health issues. In the last two years we've had five suicides within our schools and there's many more that we don't hear about. One thing that we were talking about is that we live in fear of these mental health problems that are in our community, in our valley, causing something like gun violence because it's such a pro gun area. I was wondering if any of you could speak to that and just give your perspective on something that we can do as the student organization inspired by you guys. Also wanna thank you for all the work that you've done.

Keshawn: I can actually speak on that because my community deals with the same thing. I believe that if we can have more groups and organizations that's out here that's giving us guidance and a safe haven for you to go to and feel enlightened, that you have someone care for you and is there for you, and that's gonna make you

feel warm, to be able to open up to them so that you don't feel like you have to hold a big burden on your chest. Many people out here have to deal with this on their own. They don't have the same type of guidance as someone in this audience right here may have. They need someone else to be there to step up to be like their guardian and to lead them in the right way. That's something that we should all have inside of our communities, more trauma centers and counseling inside of our schools, and also more organizations out here to deal with trauma.

Mr. Koppel: I don't know where the mic is, but we got time for two more questions.

Speaker 23: Good evening. Thank you so much for being here and for your courage and sharing your stories with us. I wanna thank you also, Kayla, for making the point that the power is in the young. I really believe in you and that whether or not this room is a ready-made audience is beside the point and I have the utmost faith in you moving forward with this initiative. Thank you. My question for you is could you please give us a plug for any organizations that you're involved in or what we can do to get involved in this issue?

Kayla: You can reach out in the community because I'm pretty sure there's little organizations forming and you can always tag along. I know the Jefferson Co students they're in Colorado, they're fighting against gun violence. I have close friends in that. We've been tagging along with [Giffords 00:51:08] and they've really been giving us the support and we've been supporting them. You can just look at your resources because we're like the generation of social media. There's media everywhere. You can look up gun control organizations and you can tag in, you can call in, and join in.

Speaker 24: Hi. One thing we haven't really talked about is the gun manufacturing industry. I'm wondering if you have anything to add to that conversation because, of course, with tobacco we looked at the industry and there have been a lot of reforms. What would you recommend for the manufacturing industry?

Mr. Koppel: I don't think you've got any expertise on the panel on that. Here, let's take one other question. Where's the mic?

Speaker 25: One of the big elephants in the room is the \$368 million dollar annual budget of the NRA, the fact that they've been paralyzing our Congress by buying away our freedom to be safe. What would you do if you could have a conversation with NRA members to persuade them about intelligent background checks and intelligent legislation?

Kayla: First of all I would say that they failed us. They're not in the same shoes as we are now, so they don't really understand our point of view and what we've been

through because they didn't have to deal with that. They need to realize that they're gonna get voted out really soon because our generation is about to vote and it's not gonna be for them.

Mr. Koppel: Alright. We are done ladies and gentlemen. I hope you'll join me in expressing our appreciation to everyone on the panel.