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Make A Change

School shootings are becoming a greater problem in today’s society. On February 14th, 2018, nineteen-year old Nikolas Cruz murdered an amount of seventeen people at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. Not only were seventeen people murdered, many others were injured during the shooting. There is a major debate over whether or not the problem was the gun, or the person holding the gun. In reality, it is both of the options. The rate of school shootings would decrease if people read the warnings before they happened, made gun control laws stricter, and offered other mental health options in all schools.

Cruz showed many signs and warnings of a potential school shooter. Neighbors were raising concerns about Cruz as early as age 9, when he got in a rock-throwing fight with another boy. An online source stated that "as he became a teenager, he showed a propensity for violence toward small animals, expressed enthusiasm about guns and knives and even began introducing himself as "a school shooter"" (Adone, "Nikolas Cruz's Behavior Raised Numerous Red Flags, but No One Intervened"). Cruz was believed to have autism, and he showed major signs of depression and anger issues. The same online source also stated that "after a breakup with a girlfriend, Cruz took to Snapchat to post images of himself cutting both his arms" (Adone, "Nikolas Cruz's Behavior Raised Numerous Red Flags, but No One Intervened") and provides evidence of Cruz’s depression. As a child, he had a passion for hurting and killing small animals much like the serial killer, Jeffrey Dahmer. In school, he showed aggressive behavior towards other students and teachers. He even showed signs on social media. A comment on a YouTube video stating, “I’m going to be a professional school shooter” was discovered and posted under the name “nikolas cruz”. If people would have recognized all of these signs, it is quite possible that the shooting would have never happened. The biggest warning sign of them all was the fact that an unstable teenager was allowed to purchase a gun.

The government needs to crack down a stricter system when it comes to gun control laws. An ABC News reporter reported that "Cruz allegedly opened fire inside the high school, killing 17 people and wounding dozens of others, with an AR-15 semi-automatic rifle authorities say he legally purchased a year ago" (Oquendo, “Student Says Nikolas Cruz Threatened to 'Kill' Him, Sent Photo of Guns Months before School Shooting”). Purchasing a gun is so easy to come by these days. Most stores will run a background check, but Cruz had a clean background. Cruz was legally able to purchase a AR-15 without any hesitation. That is a problem. The government is allowing anyone to be able to get their hands on any kind of gun. This is because gun control laws are very loose. The government should be following Japan’s ideas on gun control. A journalist stated that "In Japan, people who want to purchase a gun must attend an all-day class, pass a written test, pass a mental-health test, pass background check, and must achieve a 95% accuracy during a shooting range test" (Weller, "Japan Has Almost Completely Eliminated Gun Deaths - Here's How”). Because of these strict regulations, Japan has a very low gun-related death rate. If the U.S. were to adopt these laws, then the outcome would also be lower gun-related deaths because guns would only go into the hands of professionals. Guns do not belong in everyone’s hands, especially those with mental illness.

In school systems, mental health should be considered a priority. A guidance counselor is obviously not enough for some students. Depression, anger issues, and aggressive behavior are just a few of Cruz’s mental illnesses. Cruz rejected help, but that is because it was not offered enough. Children and teenagers are going through a lot while they are in school. They are opened up to ideas of depression, anger, and loneliness. These students are not being offered the help they need. If students who suffer from mental illness were offered professional help, students are most likely to overcome their problems. Therapy sessions should be offered, bullying should be addressed more often, and the staff needs to open up their eyes to mental health. Students who are suffering from mental health often show many signs, and it is up to the people around them to help them. Free health insurance should be offered to those who cannot afford to visit the doctor about their mental illness. That is another reason why students cannot get the help they need. According to a new study, "More Americans than ever before are suffering from mental and emotional distress" (Health, pg.1). The lack of access to mental illness treatments is only going to lead to more mental health issues. If students have greater access to these treatments, there would be a decrease of mental illnesses in schools. It is obvious that this is a problem. Mental illness is not an excuse for what Cruz did, but it is a motivation.

The solution to the debate over mental health and gun control laws is obvious. They are both issues that need to be addressed by the government. It is not just the gun, and it is not just the holder of the gun. It is both. The U.S. gun control laws are too lose and need to become stricter. Japan has an incredible gun control system, and the U.S. should adopt it. Not only should these laws become stricter, mental health needs to be addressed more in school systems. The lack of adequate treatments for mental illnesses leads to depression, anxiety, and anger in students. In the end of it all, the people are not opening their eyes to the obvious signs and warnings of potential shooters. If everyone would come together and address all problems, school shootings would be less of a concern. The young people today are going to change the views on these problems. A journalist reported the statement "And let me tell you, our students are ready for this moment" (Baty, “Read the Most Powerful Quotes From CNN's Parkland Shooting Town Hall”) and was stated by a survivor from the high school.. The students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School are prepared to make these changes, and so should the government. It is up to everyone to make a better change for students and staff members. Nobody should ever have to worry about sending their child to school.

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