

# TAKING TIME by Rebecca Escott

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For Lehigh County



## Taking Time Helps Stop Violence

Why is our gut reaction to punch someone or to shout a hurtful name when someone insults us? Statistics show that the United States is becoming increasingly violent. But violence is not just a societal issue. Violence affects small communities, families and individuals. Across the country people are also demonstrating that it's small communities, families, and individuals who have the opportunity to stop violence — one confrontation at a time.

Did you know that half of the homicides that occur in the United States are among family and friends? Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith, MD outlines the characteristics of people committing violent

crimes — the victim and assailant are at least acquainted; they are usually of the same race and are predominantly male; the violence started with an argument; usually the violence is not related to a felony (example: burglary); alcohol is usually involved; and usually a firearm is present.

Prothrow-Stith believes that children learn from an early age that violence is funny and cool. The heroes of our media usually resort to violence to solve problems. She also observes that most parents don't want "wimps" for children. But I also think that parents don't want their children or grandchildren to be severely wounded or die because of an argument or an insult.

Is there a choice? Yes.

Take the first step. Always gather information about the situation instead of running to solve the problem with only a tidbit of "news." Get the full story — both sides of the issue. Examine both the message and the messenger. This is a great technique to teach children. By taking the time to really investigate, we can often diffuse or bring new understanding to a situation.

An additional step is much harder. Each of us must make a commitment to seek non-violent solutions. Unfortunately, sometimes seeking a non-aggressive action results in us being called names or in our losing friends. This commitment will carry some costs, but it will also bring rewards.

A third step is to actually confront the offending party. This must be done with humor and grace. Present a list of the injustices that occurred and a plan to resolve them. Any confrontation, if it is to work long-term, must not humiliate the other person. It should allow the other person to do good, to repair a wrong. These three principles are part of a set of

six steps that Martin Luther King, Jr. set forth for solving community or personal problems in non-violent ways.

When I heard these ideas, I saw immediate application for families. If parents would seek the whole story before disciplining, if wives would gather details before accusing husbands, if teens would negotiate instead of just dumping friends, if neighbors would present plans for restitution instead of planning sabotage, we all would have fewer stresses, fewer hurts. But this process is a grueling one.

It takes lots of energy (and longevity) to see a difference. One of the tips that helps is to surround yourself with other people who seek to solve problems without violence. That way you have support to choose another way when your first reaction is to lash out at the person who hurt you.

By taking time to teach children (and ourselves) how to get the big picture before we respond from our gut, each of us can help to reduce the anger and violence around us. Together, we can build communities that care.

## Gardening Questions?

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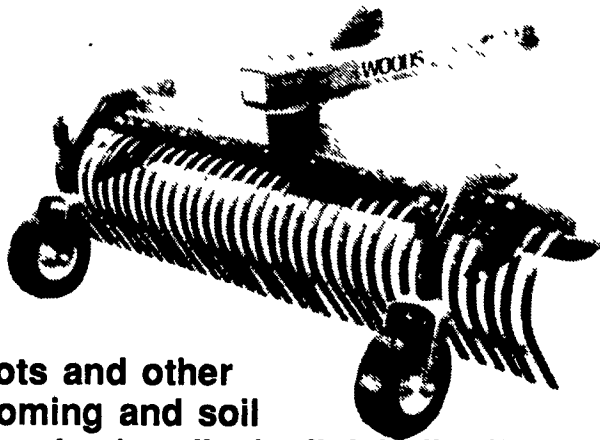
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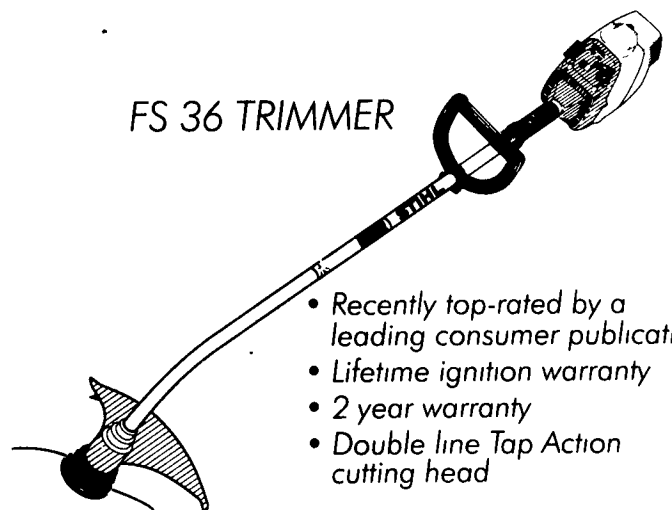
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