

Dear PPGV Friends and Colleagues,

I am furious. I cannot adequately encapsulate the grief, rage, fear, repulsion and frustration I feel as I try to process the trauma that took place at Oxford High School earlier this week. How do we understand the fact that a 15 year-old armed with a 9mm Sig Sauer semiautomatic pistol fatally shot four of his classmates and wounded seven other people (six students and a teacher)? How can we possibly pretend that we live in a civilized society when a child can commit acts of terror using a weapon of war his father purchased four days prior?

We stagger and we gasp and we may look away in horror. We are shocked, disgusted, and appalled. And so the cycle goes. Again and again and again, over and over and over. This time it happened in Michigan, in our very own backyard. Where will it happen next? Should we throw a dart at a map? Oxford High School is anywhere and everywhere.

I look at the photos of the four murdered teens and see my own children reflected in their faces. My heart aches for their surviving family and friends.

Tate Myre, 16
Hana St. Juliana, 14
Madisyn Baldwin, 17
Justin Shilling, 17

Shot to death. At school. By a classmate.

How do I look my 17 year-old high school senior in the eye and suggest to her that things are going to be okay? When I attempt to console her, she immediately detects the catch in my voice. What she actually (and accurately) hears is, "I know that kids my age were just killed at school by a fellow student. I know that this could happen at my school too. I know that I could get killed at school but I'm going to keep going there every day anyway because that's just how life is." In fact, when I spoke to my daughter about the shooting she replied, "Mom, it's just so normal now." Of course my daughter knows that things are not okay and she knows that I know that too. I hug her tightly as we face the terror of every-day life together.

The Oxford High School shooting shocks the conscience and we struggle to digest the sheer horror of co-occurring casualties. However, we must remember that this school shooting is only part of the larger story of unrelenting gun violence in America. According to the [Gun Violence Archive](#), there were 39 fatalities and 91 non fatal firearm injuries across the state of Michigan during the month of November (this data, accessed on 12/2/2021, does not fully account for suicides, which we know comprise the majority of gun deaths).

In the wake of the Oxford High School tragedy, [Governor Gretchen Whitmer tweeted](#) that she would be lowering flags across the state to honor the victims, noting that the Oxford shooting is every parent's worst nightmare. Her sentiment is, of course, spot on, but tragically, we know that the spectre of mass gun murder is no dream. Indeed, we would be fortunate if this were merely a distressing nightmare whose haunting after-effects dissipated with time and distraction. Sadly, our deadly reality is not so transient. How many more children must be sacrificed before we will, as a society, determine that we have simply had enough? We must wake up from our tortured slumber and vow to end the everpresent menace of gun atrocities in America. We do not have to live this way.

We cannot allow ourselves to become numb or paralyzed. We have work to do. The fact that you are reading this statement means that you are already engaged in the process of finding solutions. As health care providers, we must routinely talk to our patients about firearms safety and provide education about safe storage. As Americans, we have a responsibility to [connect with our elected leaders](#) and advocate for legislative sanity around guns. Please, I implore you to stay involved in this fight, in whatever capacity you can.

I dream of a world in which we can confidently send our children to school knowing that they will return home alive at the end of the day. This expectation of safety is not an unreasonable aspiration, rather it is what we should demand in our world. We must never allow ourselves to become complacently complicit with the current state of affairs. 100 daily American deaths due to firearms need not be inevitable, but to reverse this, each of us must choose to become active agents of change. Working together, we have the power to create a new reality. If only we have the vision to do so.

Sincerely,

Sonya Lewis, MD, MPH, Physicians for the Prevention of Gun Violence Vice President
On behalf of Jerry Walden, MD, Physicians for the Prevention of Gun Violence President
Physicians for the Prevention of Gun Violence Board of Directors