



To Stop Gun Violence, Make Inaction Unacceptable
by Sheila Madigan Levatino

As a retired marriage and family therapist and former hospital chaplain, I see a disturbing similarity between our nation's apathy towards gun violence and the cycle of violence I helped treat in domestic abuse cases.

I joined the nation in agonizing over the mass shootings of recent weeks, one in San Francisco and the other in Alexandria, Virginia. As I experienced grief and anxiety over this "new normal" in our country, I also began to wonder why Americans' seeming helplessness over our pervasive gun culture and its resulting violence isn't turned into healthy anger. Most Americans want reasonable gun laws that keep guns away from mentally ill adults and teenagers in crisis, as well as universal background checks on all gun purchases. Why are we failing to hold our legislators accountable for their willingness to accept massive amounts of gun lobby money and their cowering to the lobby's demands?

This paradox reminds me of the dead-lock dynamic I saw countless times within domestic violence. The domestic violence cycle becomes entrenched when couples get emotionally stuck in a cycle of escalating anger that explodes into a physical assault of the victim. The perpetrator is unwilling to deescalate this anger and avoid violence. Then the perpetrator repents, the victim accepts the apology, and life goes on until another conflict arises and the perpetrator acts out violently again. Then, of course, comes another apology and the victim's acceptance of the apology; the cycle begins again, conflict escalates, and violence ensues again and again and again.

When it comes to gun violence, the American people are the victims and our elected leaders are the perpetrators. Our legislators, the perpetrators, willingly take lots and lots of money from the gun lobby, making them beholden to the industry agenda – an agenda that leaves out any legislation to reduce gun violence in our country.

In domestic violence, the cycle can finally be broken when the perpetrator learns the skills necessary to resolve conflict without any violence – a change often prompted by arrest, then mandated anger management classes or therapy. The victim in our epidemic of violence, the American people, must, in turn, learn assertiveness and be willing to take action. We as community members who no longer want to be victims must use the proven methods of inducing pressure through protests and using clear and ongoing messages to confront our legislators until the gun safety message has been heard.

Please join me in this gun safety journey and stand up to your elected officials, your public servants. It can be as challenging as relationship transformation, but just as successful, too, if we stand up for ourselves and demand change. The violence can end.