Over the past few days we've all learned a bit more about 20 beautiful 6- and 7-year-olds who each seem as if they could have been any of our children or grandchildren. Jessica asked Santa for new cowgirl boots for Christmas. Daniel's family said he "earned" all the ripped knees on his jeans. James liked to remind people that he was six *and* three-quarters. Grace loved playing dress-up and with her dog Puddin.'

As the stories kept coming about the children and teachers at Sandy Hook Elementary School and their families began saying goodbye, many of us have spent much of the last week in tears. But many parents, especially those with their own young children, have instead gone through each day desperately willing themselves *not* to cry, trying to do what little they could to protect their children from the overwhelming adult sadness all around them. After all, for most parents protecting their children is a primal and primary instinct.

This is just one reason this tragedy, which happened in school—a place where tens of millions of parents send their children every single day and need to trust they will be safe, has instilled so much horror and despair.

When two serial snipers terrorized the Washington, D.C. area 10 years ago, using a Bushmaster .223-caliber rifle very similar to the one used in the Newtown shootings, one of the most horrifying moments came after the shooters targeted a child on his way to school, later asserting in a note: "Your children are not safe anywhere at any time."

After this latest tragedy, America's mothers, grandmothers, fathers, grandfathers, and all those with a mothering spirit *must* finally stand up and fight that truth and make our politicians act to fight that truth doing whatever it takes for as long as it takes. We
must
seize the moment and say
"no more."

Right now the pervasive culture of violence in America only reinforces the sense of threat both children and adults feel. This year's "Black Friday" shopping set a record for gun sales: the FBI reported 154,873 requests for background checks from shoppers wanting to buy guns on the day after Thanksgiving *alone*. Those numbers are not about what many people think of as the "criminal" gun culture involving guns bought and sold on the streets. These are the guns being sold to the millions of Americans who are willing and able to go through background checks and follow all existing laws and proper legal channels so that they can either buy guns for their own pleasure or their own theoretical protection.

It appears the Newtown shooter's mother fell into this very large category of Americans. There were 16.8 million background checks in 2012, nearly double the number 10 years ago. What is it about American culture that encourages tens of millions of Americans to either use guns as a form of entertainment or feel so fearful they believe they need guns in their homes, including semiautomatic weapons and high capacity ammunition clips designed specifically to kill large numbers of other people, to feel a sense of safety?

Why are we so terrified of one another, even during periods when actual crime rates go down?

There is an obvious connection between that feeling of terror and the culture of violence that saturates Americans in violent language, violent imagery, and violent entertainment. Right now, instead of responding as parents and a nation by saying *“no”* to the culture of violence, we are apparently responding by defensively arming ourselves with more and bigger weapons. If that cycle of violence and fear is having such a deep psychological impact on adults, how do we expect our children to navigate or survive it?

The Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence reports a gun in the home is more likely to be used in a homicide, suicide, or unintentional shooting than it is to be used in self-defense. Other studies have found guns in a home are more likely to kill or injure a family member or friend than a stranger.

Guns lethalize anger and despair. Gun owners who know these facts seem to either discredit the research behind them or hold to the belief their own guns and families would certainly be the exception. If the Newtown shooter’s mother knew those risks she likely felt the same way. In fact, if her son had only used her guns to kill her or kill himself, it would have been an outcome that would never have been national news. Instead, the weapons she apparently chose to buy and bring into her home were used to kill her, her child, and 26 other people who were all somebody else’s mother, child, or both.

All mothers who allow firearms in their homes should ask themselves what kinds of guns they are deliberately, inadvertently, or by example giving their own children access to—and *why*? All mothers who don’t keep guns in their own homes but do allow their children to visit anyone else’s homes should be aware that nearly half of Americans say they keep a gun in their home or on their property, that one-third of homes with children younger than age 18 have guns, and that more than 40 percent of guns in homes with children present are left unlocked. Before your child visits a friend or relative’s home, do you ask? If not, it’s time to start. Parents need to wake up and take care to protect all children.

There are many more questions: Do you buy your child violent video games? *Why*? Do you allow your child to see violent movies or listen to music with violent lyrics?
Why
? Do you keep those things from your children but continue to do them for your own entertainment?
Why
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Why
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Why
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An advertising campaign for bestselling Bushmaster rifles uses the tag line “Consider Your Man Card Reissued.” When the Newtown shooter used that Bushmaster .223 semiautomatic rifle to kill seven women and 20 first-graders, did he earn his “man card?” Is this the best definition of American manhood we have to give our children?

On April 4, 1967, exactly a year to the day before he would be killed by a gun, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave the speech “Beyond Vietnam” at New York City’s Riverside Church. He said: “We still have a choice today: nonviolent coexistence or violent coannihilation. We must move past indecision to action . . . If we do not act, we shall surely be dragged down the long, dark, and shameful corridors of time reserved for those who possess power without compassion, might without morality, and strength without sight.”

For mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts and uncles, neighbors, teachers, faith leaders and everyone else in America who is saying *enough*, this is our moment. Which one will we choose?

(Please sign CDF’s letter to the President and members of Congress demanding they #ProtectChildrenNotGuns)

Marian Wright Edelman is president of the Children’s Defense Fund whose Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. For more information go to www.childrensdefense.org.