

A few days after the Florida shooting my mom sent me a Facebook post from a fellow teacher. Some of you might have seen it. It says in reference to the 17 people who died, "How about you make friends with 17 kids you normally wouldn't. Smile at 17 people you wouldn't normally smile at, say a kind word to 17 people who might not have someone to speak to, open up your heart to 17 people who might be hurting, offer friendship to 17 people who might have had none. Now that could change the climate of a school. 17 reasons for change. 17 reasons to make a difference. What's your 17?"

Compassion is defined as "sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others." Empathy is "the ability to understand and share the feelings of another." Both simple dictionary definitions, yet still so difficult to achieve. We have a climate--globally, domestically, locally--which is pushing us more and more to an extreme us vs them society. Social media and heightened political conflict both within the country and through the whole world, even here at Timpview, are causing people to forget that more than being American or Korean, Conservative or Liberal, Caucasian or Black or Latino, Mormon or Atheist, we are all human beings. For us, as high school students, it is easy to push aside conflict and put it into the box of "out of my control" and forget the root cause. It is also easy to conclude that we as individuals are "nice" people and forget that kindness and compassion are never stationary. It is easy for us to assume that just sticking to our own friends, or refusing to cross the line between sociality and human connection, or only being aware of our own beliefs, is not part of the problem. We pretend that the way we treat others has nothing to do with the larger problems of society.

Imagine a world where everyone is kind and compassionate. Is that ever going to happen if we the future generation, in the center of the developed world, cannot practice basic empathy in our daily interactions? Dictionary answer: No. Standing in Solidarity with Stoneman Douglas High School here today, an important factor to remember is that each of us here took that first step in standing up against gun violence, in standing in favor of school safety and mental health, but none of that matters if we can't create a school climate, here and now where anyone and everyone feels accepted. We have to make a choice as individuals to ensure that no one we come in contact with ever feels lesser for having been around us.

I'm going to challenge all of us to think for a moment about those around us who are struggling.

Think about friends, peers, classmates, neighbors.

The ones who wear their pain on their sleeves, and the ones who wear the best masks.

Think about who in your lives needs a smile, a hello, a hug, a friend...

Now imagine that world, Imagine a world where *everyone* is kind and compassionate.

Where do *you* fit into that definition of *everyone*?

You have spent your 17 minutes. Now, imagine that world, and make the choice of how are *you* going to be better.

What's *your* 17?

Thank you.