close to the bone for me. In a world where parents have to deal with teenage drinking, drug abuse, sexual promiscuity, this type of school massacre which seems to be on the rise is yet another horror that we now need to be aware of. I wonder why it is that despite the fact that Tim was said to have suffered from fits of depression, be reclusive, have few friends and had also visited a psychiatric clinic at least five times to receive treatment, nothing had been done to try and resolve the issues that were causing his unhappiness.

Why is that these days so many teenagers find themselves disaffected and alienated? Who is to blame? Their families? Society and the conventions the youth of today find themselves having to conform to? The inability to integrate with their peers or is it because they find themselves the victims of ridicule and humiliation by others? Not being a psychologist, I have no answer to these questions but as a parent desperately want to find out.

I think what is important for us to remember here is that although Tim Kerscher's actions may be an extreme example of teenage angst, there are countless other adolescents and young people who suffer in silence. But this does not make it any less significant. We have seen how children can be unbelievably cruel to their contemporaries, sometimes intentionally and sometimes unaware of the impact their actions have on the person they are directed at. There seems to be such importance given to appearances these days whether it is the way you look or the way you dress, where someone who does not conform to the norms is regarded as "weird" or termed a "freak".

In many cases the lack of self worth and a low self esteem can result in teenagers living an almost virtual existence where all their interactions take place over the internet or where they are immersed in countless computer games. They turn to the cyber world where they feel they are in control unlike the situations they find themselves in the real world. Other youngsters turn to drugs as a form of escapism. What worries me is that instead of trying to delve into the psyche of these children and recognising the underlying causes attributing to their anxiety, anger or misdemeanours, we are quick to judge and condemn.

We read about the Tim Kertschers of the world and shake our heads in disapproval and feel a pang of sympathy for the victims of the massacre and their families. But what is becoming more and more apparent is that these random acts of violence are not restricted to a certain country or a particular demographic. These days where we are constantly hearing of families becoming dysfunctional and parents being unable to relate to or communicate with their children, it is even more imperative that we take the time to understand them and see beyond their faults and shortcomings. What we cannot do is ignore telltale signs of alienation and unhappiness by writing them off as irrational teenage behaviour. Above all what we cannot do is give up on our children.

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