

Chicago parents and other community leaders must work together to make sure this summer isn't deadly for our children

By Jeffery M. Leving

While many divorced and separated parents live with the worry that a school shooting can happen anywhere, anytime — parents in Chicago tend to worry the most when school is out for the summer. This year the heightened worrying season began June 12, which was the last day of class for Chicago Public Schools.

The reason so many parents worry more once school is out for the summer is simple and real. Sadly, summer in downtown Chicago and more can be the deadliest time of year. Traditionally, when the temperature goes up, so does the homicide rate. June, July and August have become the deadliest months of the year.



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While experts debate the reason for the uptick in violence in the summer months, it seems that because more people are outside and the days are longer, it creates more of an opportunity for interpersonal conflict. Especially for kids who are out of school and roaming the streets unsupervised.

There have already been calls for the city to proactively address this problem. After a 9-year-old girl was killed and 10 others injured in a mass shooting in the Back of the Yards neighborhood in April of last year, community advocates spoke out about the need for more effective strategies focusing on youth intervention and mental health.

After the April mass shooting, Mayor Brandon Johnson set up a mass canvassing event in the neighborhood to give community members access to behavioral teams, victim services and case management. That is good, but I say more needs to be done before gun violence takes place.

There is a need for more programs to get kids off the streets, especially those whose parents are at work or otherwise unable to keep an eye on them all the time. CPS should also be encouraging kids who are old enough to apply for summer jobs, as a way to make some money, learn some invaluable skills and keep themselves out of trouble.

Most importantly, parents need to encourage their kids to get involved in something productive so that they have something to do this summer. All too often, kids with nothing to do fall prey to gangs and bad behavior and in the worst cases, end up as victims to gun violence.

Hillary Clinton famously said that it takes a village to raise a child and while that can be debated, it takes the efforts of parents, schools and City Hall to keep many of our at-risk children safe.

This summer could be especially perilous as the mass protests we've seen will likely continue which may need a lot of police resources that would otherwise be used to patrol neighborhoods and keep our kids safe.

As I mentioned already, parents are a big part of the equation — perhaps the most important part. They need to start talking to their kids now to put a schedule or plan in place for the summer. For divorced and separated parents, they must effectively communicate with each other for the sake of their children. While many have to work, they should try to prioritize seeing their children even more in the summer whenever possible.

The bottom line is we all have a stake in this, and we all should be doing whatever we can. That goes for city officials, police brass and divorced and separated parents — as well as parent figures in the greater community. If you're a small business owner, consider hiring a couple of kids for the summer. If you have connections to a larger company, urge them to start an intern program.

Together, the people of Chicago must work together to help our kids and break the deadly cycle of the summer uptick in violence. Saving our kids starts now with us.

Attorney Jeffery M. Leving who has dedicated his career to safeguarding children of divorce and separation and reuniting them with their fathers, has authored three acclaimed books: "Fathers' Rights," "Divorce Wars" and "How to be a Good Divorced Dad," the latter of which was endorsed by Cardinal Francis E. George, then the Archbishop of Chicago. Visit Jeffery M. Leving at dadsrights.com.