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Sticks and Stones

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Christina Taylor Green was born on September 11, 2001; she was nine years old when she was shot and killed on January 7, 2011. Christina's is the Arizona face in the book, *Faces of Hope* that included one baby from each state born on that fateful day almost 10 years ago. Today her beautiful smile is on the front page of newspapers and at the center of television screens around the world. Christina had just been elected to her student council so she wanted to meet her Congresswoman; a young leader whose life was cut short by tragedy in a shopping mall in Tucson, Arizona. Our thoughts and prayers go out to her parents and extended family who so courageously spoke of her innocent and hopeful spirit. We cannot help but grieve the loss of our children's innocence.

"Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words will never hurt me." I remember this phrase from my childhood; it was how we responded to someone who was calling us names, putting us down, or just being mean. While this response was a way to deflect the pain, it did not really help because words did hurt; we just pretended that they didn't. Today's children are no different, words still hurt them, but the sticks and stones have turned into guns and bullets.

During sad times like these, we can't help but be angry or lose hope for the future. Every day, we hear voices seemingly intent on proving that anyone who disagrees with "our" point of view is wrong and should be silenced. Most will agree that we live in a time when our profound differences of opinion are escalating from words to much more violent expressions – from sticks and stones to guns and bullets.

Words can be influential instruments of hate and anger that can lodge in the hearts and minds of those who are focused on destruction and despair. Words can also be powerful sources of encouragement meant for good and kind purposes. The power of suggestion is far more significant than any one of us

wants to admit. We must not underestimate the potential that words have to be used as sticks and stones.....or guns and bullets.

While our leaders set the example for appropriate and civil behavior, we cannot simply blame our public officials for the culture of hostility in which we live. Each one of us must take responsibility for the ways in which we interact. As adults, we should provide the example to our children on how to resolve differences without violence. Ironically, just a few days following the Tucson tragedy, we observe the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a public leader who walked among us pleading for a nonviolent response to injustice. His words ring so true today, "*Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.*"

Regardless of our own perspective on any issue, let's find ways to disagree and even get angry, without resorting to violence. Otherwise our children will see only hate, darkness, and despair rather than love, light and hope. As we grieve and search for answers to this shooting tragedy, let's remind ourselves that we can and must participate in transforming our current culture of violence to one of care and kindness. Our children deserve nothing less.

Special Note: Our heartfelt condolences to the families of Judge John Roll, Gabe Zimmerman, Dorwin Stoddard, Dorothy Murray, Phyllis Scheck, and Christina Taylor Green. Our thoughts and prayers for the recovery of those injured including Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords. In addition, we pray for the parents of Jared Lee Loughner, who are also wounded by this terrible tragedy.

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