The day that I took a knife to school

I took a knife to school when I was 17. It would be fair to say I was a little unhinged, somewhat drowning in testosterone, still grieving from a bereavement and harbouring pent-up fury from an incident a couple of years earlier when I'd been assaulted.

I felt persecuted by another boy in my year — looking back it was just a bit of teasing and I believe, in hindsight, he probably did not mean much by it. But my self-esteem was shot to pieces; I did not know how to protect myself from what felt like an assault on my character and I reached boiling point.

Today, the memory of grabbing the sharpest kitchen knife I could find and putting it in my school bag along with my books and packed lunch horrifies me. Someone must have been looking out for me that day because my persecutor was away from school.

I like to think that when it came down to it I would not have used my weapon, that I had merely armed myself in a perverse cry for help: look at me, I'm in emotional turmoil.

At the time, I confided in two friends at school that I had brought a knife with me. They did not tell anyone, but one of them urged me to talk to someone "professionally". He meant it kindly and he was right.

The major events in my life that affected me were my mother's death from cancer when I was 14 and an assault during that same year by a man who lured me into his house on the pretext that he had a present for Mum.

It took me many, many years to get over both seismic events, and the assault eroded my trust in people, but get over these events I eventually did, largely thanks to the help of two counsellors and my own determination to do so.

I shun violence. As a parent, I worried for my own children, impressing on them always to turn the other cheek and to talk to adults if they felt bullied.

Still, as a teenager I took umbrage at everything. In one mad moment of hot-headedness, just by possessing a knife, the potential existed for a devastating crime to be committed from which there would have been no return.

In my own case, thankfully, the moment of madness passed, my persecutor never bothered me again and I left school shortly after.

Adolescents need protecting from themselves and each other. They must be helped so as not to destroy their own lives and the lives of those around them in a moment of madness they could regret for the rest of their lives — even if that means putting scanners at school entrances or searching pupils for weapons and drugs. Knowing myself as I do now, I do not believe I would have done the deed, but there are sure to be other teenagers like me in the future. I would never have dared take a weapon into school if I had thought the knife could have been discovered at the school gate.

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