

Struggling to Understand

Category: Unvaccinated

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | September 1, 2021

As a person, a student, and a teacher, I have always played by the rules (or even the suggestions) set by authority figures. Even if a rule irks me—I do not like being confined by a seatbelt, for example—I follow it. The Surgeon General’s advice that cigarettes can be lethal made even the thought of lighting up seem like a sin, and I have never smoked. So when scientists stated that vaccines would help in the fight against COVID-19, I got my two doses of Moderna.

Because of my rule-following nature, I have grappled with the decision by so many Americans to remain unvaccinated against COVID. I do not understand how they can ignore the advice of physicians and researchers or dismiss the risk of harming themselves or their loved ones by refusing to get the shots. The news offers daily reports of people of all ages lying in ICUs, fighting to overcome the virus. All of these patients share the same regret: “If only I had been vaccinated.” And they offer the same plea: “Please get vaccinated.” Some survive, but too many die preventable deaths.

My challenge is to remain an accepting person, not a judgmental one, but too frequently I hear myself screaming at the television, “Why didn’t you get vaccinated?” I dislike people who criticize others—almost as much as I disdain people who act in a selfish way that has the potential to hurt others.

To live in a world occupied by the unvaccinated—and yet to remain a decent, accepting person—I draw on the words of Harper Lee. I first read *To Kill a Mockingbird* as an eighth grader; I have since read it dozens of times and shared it with countless numbers of middle school students. The message from Atticus to Scout is a simple one: “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view—until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.” To understand the unvaccinated, then, I try to see things from their perspective. Maybe their faith prevents them from putting science above religion; maybe their fear of the vaccine’s untested long-term effects causes them to shy away from it; maybe they believe they are healthy enough and lucky enough that they’ll escape the disease.

I try to understand and accept without judging. But it is hard.

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