

## #shes9

Why would nine adults -- all armed, trained police at that -- subdue a frantic 9 year-old girl by handcuffing and pepper spraying her face?

No answer to that question is even remotely justified.

This young girl just saw a fight between her parents, is clearly in crisis, is verbally threatened by her mom, and repeatedly yells that she wants to see her dad. Instead of helping her, or calming her down, multiple police insist she get in their car, threaten her with arrest, handcuff and finally pepper spray her.

Rochester police officer: "You're acting like a child!" Rochester girl: "I **am** a child!"

When is it that police do not see children as children? A [recent study](#) by Children's National Hospital in Washington, D.C. found that Black children ages 12 – 17 were six times more likely to be shot to death by police than white children. Hispanic children's risk of death was almost three times higher than that of white children. Black boys' and [girls' childhoods](#) get erased. When white people acting in any official capacity fail to see children as children, it's almost always racism, pure and simple.

There are heart sickeningly too many Black kids like Tamir Rice killed, hurt or traumatized simply because children are not seen as children. And there are far too many fathers and mothers separated from their children, family members treated as non-human, simply because of structural and ever-present racism, too. That requires systemic solutions.

Removing armed police from all Monroe County schools, like the City of Rochester and School District has now done, is a good start. So is having specially trained mental health first responders, rather than police criminalizing crisis behaviors as a first response. For many years, the Rochester City Police Department budget has been 8 – 9 times larger than the Department of Recreation and Youth Services, and the Public Library. The Children's Agenda's [annual analysis of the City budget](#) calls this fact out and calls for greater transparency on police and youth interactions, along with greater investments in programs serving our children and youth. Two weeks ago The Children's Agenda called on the City in [our recommendations](#) to the Policy Accountability Board to:

1. Increase training for police on interacting with youth, de-escalation, and diversion;
2. Establish concrete plans for reducing police and youth interactions;
3. Eliminate permanent police presence at schools, recreation centers, and other youth-centered spaces; and
4. Expand restorative justice programs.

These are systemic solutions to the problems before the next 9 (or 5 or 10 or 18) year-old gets hurt. The only possible missing ingredient is the political will to make that happen.

But if nine members of the Rochester Police Department can cause this problem, then surely nine members of the Rochester City Council (plus one Mayor) can take the next step to get us out of it. At the federal, state and local levels, all elected officials must use the urgency of the moment to begin repairing this broken system.