

Make a Memorial T-shirt Clothesline

Memorialize and bring public attention to victims of gun violence in your community by making your own t-shirt clothesline!

Supplies

Orange t-shirts (blank or printed, any size)
Black fabric or acrylic paint
Sponge-tip brushes or childrens' jumbo paint brushes
Paper plates or used plastic food containers
Squares of cardboard (15x15 inches)
Cotton clothesline cord (50 or 100-ft length, available at dollar stores)
Needle/thread or glue gun (for tacking shirts to the line)
Clothespins (optional, for aesthetic value)
Zip ties (optional, for securing knots)
Scissors

Total cost including all supplies: \$3-4 per shirt

Any brand/size t-shirt with/without print will do because you can always turn them inside out. Many thrift stores have half-price sale days or might even be willing to donate shirts to your cause if you write them a letter explaining your intent. This would work well if you have plenty of time to collect shirts. If you want to make your clothesline fairly quickly, Michaels sells a 12-pack of blank orange youth-size t-shirts for less than \$30 online, which is comparable to a sale price for a used t-shirt at a thrift store.

Black paint shows up well on orange fabric. Once dry, fabric paint is softer and more pliable than acrylic paint. Either one will work for the clothesline. We used fabric paint and the shirts do flip up over the clothesline in a gust of wind. Acrylic paint might make them stiffer and less likely to do that. The most important thing is for the paint to be waterproof so that it doesn't run if your shirts get rained on.

Steps

1. Gather a list of names.

Your list may include victims of accidents and suicides involving guns, mass shootings, and/or retaliatory gun violence in your community. You may limit the list to a particular event or all victims within a given timeframe. Your list may be victims under the age of 18, if children are the focus of your advocacy. The list may include the injured or only those who lost their lives. One resource for finding statistics with links to news articles sorted by city/region is GunViolenceArchive.org.

2. Select a location for your installation.

Getting permission and buy-in from a private entity (like a business or non-profit) to install on their property between trees, lampposts, or buildings can work very well. If you want to hang it in a public space, consider obtaining approval from a city arts commission or obtaining a permit. Another option is to just hang it up somewhere (such as a city park) and know that it may or may not last more than a few days before someone takes it down. If you go that route, be sure to consider how you will safely get it up to an appropriate height. If displaying over a roadway or parking lot, be sure to consider the tallest vehicles that will need to pass underneath. Use care not to damage property. Considering the weight of a length of cord with multiple shirts on it (especially if they get rained on), it might be best to do shorter segments between several points (like several trees).

3. Paint the shirts

Gather with friends and families of victims to paint the shirts together as a group. Or set up a table at an event and invite members of the public to paint a name on a shirt from your list or someone they know who was a victim of gun violence. This process can be very healing. Place squares of cardboard between the layers of the shirt to keep them from sticking together. Use the paper plates or plastic food containers for dabbing brushes in paint. Lay flat to dry completely, then paint the name on the other side. People may enjoy adding other artistic elements to the shirt of their loved one (like painted angel wings, or other symbols of significance).

4. Attach shirts to clothesline cord

Cut a $\frac{1}{8}$ - $\frac{1}{4}$ inch slit in the shoulder seam at top of each sleeve, just large enough to pass the cotton clothesline cord in one shoulder, through the shirt, and out the other shoulder. Position shirts on cord with 2-3 inches between each shirt. Use needle and thread or a glue gun to tack the shirts to the cotton cord to prevent sliding, bunching, or being pulled down easily. (Needle and thread will be more secure, but may take a little more time). Clothespins can be added optionally later to accentuate the "look" of a clothesline, but they are not holding the shirts on the line.

5. Prepare a statement of purpose, letter to the editor, or press release

Timing the installation with a press release can give your clothesline wider visibility. If that does not feel important, a simple statement of purpose that can be laminated and posted near your installation can provide some helpful explanation to passersby.

6. Install your clothesline

Please let us know if you are making a t-shirt clothesline for your community! Write to us at bev@diabetesed.net. We would be happy to answer questions or help you brainstorm, if needed. We hope this activity provides a way for you to process and heal together in community and raise awareness about the problem of gun violence.