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Can freedom of expression help us build a better world? Personally, I don't believe it can; not by itself anyway. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19, everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers (UN General Assembly, 1948). While this declaration from the United Nations helps to encourage the sharing of knowledge and ideas among people and cultures from around the world, it doesn't require that people express those ideas with universal respect for differences in culture, race, political views, ideology, religion or really anything else that helps to create our unique identities. In order to truly advance our society and make our world a better place for everyone, we must be able to have honest conversations that come from a place of mutual respect and serve to build up our communities rather than divide and polarize those around us. Freedom of expression by itself will not change the world for the better; however, if coupled with a universal desire to respect one another and approach all situations with a mindset that seeks to share and listen for understanding, we can advance our communities and our world in ways that we could never imagine or think possible.

While the freedom of expression rights may guarantee a person the right to say or think freely without the threat of punishment, it does not guarantee that the person's thoughts or opinions will be accepted and understood by their audience, nor does it guarantee the person's audience will be respectful and open-minded to that certain thought or opinion. To assume that freedom of expression can help build a "better" world just because people are free to think and say as they wish without punishment, is to assume that those receiving that message are either in agreement or open-minded enough to consider another perspective. In today's world, there are many live examples of why freedom of expression alone cannot help us evolve and move in the right direction. The current battles that are so prominent in the news today between the Republican party and the Democratic party are a great example of this. While both sides are able to freely demonstrate and vocalize their thoughts and opinions on certain issues affecting our country, there is rarely a time where everyone agrees with one another or can come together through compromise to create a resolution together. Once members of a party disagree with one another, it would be professional and wise to have a civilized debate where everyone treats each other with respect and keeps an open mind while discussing solutions; however, while representatives for each party may be able to do this, your average civilian republican and democrat may have other ideas on how to handle their disagreements. To get more specific, the recent overturning of *Roe v. Wade* on June 24, 2022 by the U.S Supreme Court - which

eliminated the constitutional right to abortion - created a ripple effect across the nation that led to violent clashes between protesters and supporters of the ruling, and endangered the lives of women seeking reproductive healthcare. Circumstances like these stem from people's inability to respectfully share ideas and consider someone else's viewpoint. There are numerous other examples in our society that demonstrate this problem with freedom of expression without universal respect for one another, including the current negative climate that can be seen and felt on social media. Individuals who call themselves friends, family and co-workers often find themselves in arguments over controversial topics like politics, vaccines and education, as well as more trivial subjects such as sports, entertainment and pop culture. With social media being installed on almost every American phone and always at our fingertips, it is easy and common to create unnecessary conflict in places such as the comments section of social media posts and videos, particularly in posts that contain controversial information. Considering the far reaching influence that social media can have on our society, it again becomes hard to believe that freedom of expression by itself is capable of making this world a better place. So how can we change that?

The right to freedom of expression alone will not be able to build a better world, but when paired with the universal respect and dignity that people deserve, the future can be bright. With the state of our society at the moment, one could say we can only go up from here. If we want to be hopeful about generating this respect for one another, we need to start reinforcing the idea in our schools. The youth of today's world can create a better future for the youth of another generation by working to create a healthy environment in our schools that is rich with respect and understanding for one another. By starting with education on respect and character early in our schools, the youth of today can be instilled with values that they will be able to carry with them and share out in their communities throughout their lives. Ultimately, I believe this can shape the way we look at each other in the future. Reinforcing the idea of mutual respect can be something as simple as having students generate their own opinions on appropriate topics and then giving students the opportunity to disagree and debate in a respectful manner and in a safe space that is monitored by an adult. Repeating this activity as the students continue through school allows them to practice a skill that is as important as being able to tie their own shoes, and practice is how we learn. It's creating muscle memory for respecting and understanding their peers' opinions, which students are then able to apply to the real world where they can help resolve tension between arguments and keep difficult conversations under control before things get out of hand. Looking forward, I believe that if we can teach our youth how to be controlled and open minded with one another, arguments can become conversations, problems can be solved with well-crafted solutions reached through compromise, and violence associated with arguments can become infrequent. This is what freedom of expression coupled with universal respect can look like and it can be the start of a better world for us all. Like with so many other things, our schools can and should play a major role in this, beginning with education and ending with practical experience.

In our society, freedom of expression is utilized by all of us every day, but sometimes in ways that can hurt others. That very reason is why we can't simply say freedom of expression alone can help us create a better world because if we continue to hurt each other and end relationships with the way we think and act, our world will never become "better." However, focusing on our future through our youth can create hope for positive change. Creating communities where universal respect for one another is the "norm" can completely change our world for the better and what better way to do that than by teaching children how to respect and listen to one another. Can freedom of expression help build a better world? Maybe, maybe not. But perhaps the better question to ask is this: can our world afford to continue promoting the idea of freedom of expression without giving people the tools and knowledge they need to be able to treat each other with respect?