

Teen Violence: A Call for Effective Parenting?

Is teen violence an offspring of parenting? With the recurring and senseless acts of violence perpetrated by young people today, we must seriously, as parents and citizens, 1) ask ourselves why this is happening, 2) look at our own contributions to this behavior in our children, and 3) take action to implement solutions post-haste. If indeed, it is the content of our parenting... what then can each of us do to help end this cycle of thoughtless and unnecessary violence?

There exists a plethora of public research and resources on how to raise children effectively. Yet, crime, violence, school dropout rates, drug misuse, bullying, date rape, child abuse, and a host of other maladies continue to plague our children and our communities. Could it be that parents are not heeding the advice of the professional community on how to parent effectively?

There is little question that parenting is a very tough job and a sensitive subject. How often do you run into a parent who readily admits they have no clue how to parent effectively? Most see themselves as good parents, and the truth is a lot of them really are. To offer up a position that questions their ability to parent effectively is asking for a chewing out and the possible loss of a friendship.

Could it be that few parents adhere to the parenting advice of professionals because they—the parent—see themselves as the expert at parenting? After all, the child they are parenting is their child. Does it then just make sense that the parent would know what is best for “*their child*” rather than some stranger? Could this be it? Yet when a child goes awry, the parent holds him/herself blameless, quickly going on the defensive with a discourse on their parenting skills and the many sacrifices made to ensure that their child lives a good life. But the truth of their parenting stands before them in the image of a broken child and a future menace to society.

What does parenting have to do with it? Simply put—a whole lot.

Behaviorists in the field of child psychology remain resolute in their findings that the issues of teen violence, substance misuse, school dropout, bullying, crime, juvenile delinquency, and teen pregnancy are traceable to both environmental factors in the home and parenting.

In communities of all sizes and shapes, parents face multiple challenges that may inhibit their ability to effectively raise and support their children. Government and private reports indicate that nearly one in five American children live in poverty and many more lack a decent standard of living because their families hover near the poverty level or move in and out of official poverty. The 805,000 children in the foster care system indicate that many parents are highly challenged by the role of parenting.

In 2001, substantiated reports of child abuse and neglect submitted to child protection agencies involved more than 903,000 children (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services). Children in homes in which domestic abuse occurs are physically abused and neglected at a rate 15 times the national average and are 12-14 times more likely to be sexually abused by family members or friends of the family. This abuse happens to both boys and girls of all ages.

Moreover, the increasing incidence of parental substance abuse, child abuse and neglect (often related to substance abuse), parental AIDS, incarceration, divorce, and desertion have resulted in substantially higher rates of children raised by someone other than the natural parent. In society today, more and more children are becoming disposable.

The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, tells us what we all know—that children grow and thrive in the context of close and dependable relationships that provide love and nurturance, security, responsive interaction, and encouragement for exploration. Without at least one such relationship, development is disrupted and the consequences can be severe and long

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lasting. If provided or restored, however, a sensitive care giving relationship can foster remarkable recovery.

The knowledge, information, and resources to change in order to help our children is at our fingertips and within our power. It is called parenting education.

Parenting education is about helping parents raise children who are physically, emotionally, and spiritually healthy. And, it benefits everybody. Children do better at home and at school, are less likely to engage in risky behaviors, and are better prepared to transition to adulthood. Parenting is less stressful, families are more cohesive, and the community is more vibrant and safe for all.

To meet their responsibilities, all parents—including those who feel they are doing a good job at parenting—need support from individuals, family-friendly institutions, and caring communities. The goal of parent education is to strengthen parents' capability to draw upon available resources for their own and their children's well-being.

Throughout history, neighbors and the community have always played a crucial role in helping parents raise children. Yet, it appears that the 21st Century generation of parents is over-confident in their abilities to do it alone. A Family and Social Services Administration Report of Families found that youngsters and adolescents are increasingly making difficult lifestyle choices on their own, with more than 25% of sixth graders spending unsupervised time at home and 60% of high school seniors. Given the critical role of parenting in the emotional, mental, and physical development of a child, who then is raising the children?

What we do know is that teen violence and child abuse links to the lack of attention children receive from overworked, too busy, self-absorbed, trying to be like the Jones' parents and lifestyles.

There are many things parenting is not. It does not happen simply by birthing a child and taking on the title of parent. The ability to parent effectively is a process of time, involvement, and

nurturing, guiding, and leading children into productive adult lives. Parenting is certainly not an easy task. Nor is it a process where one must go it alone. How a person parents has a direct connection to the vibrancy and safety of not only the child but also the family, the parents, and the community. Being a parent does not mean you have all the answers.

Is teen violence a call for effective parenting through parent education? Given the nature of those caught in the act, and the history of the circumstances surrounding their development, we can surmise that effective parenting is a step toward circumvention of these violent outward expressions of a gaping hole inside.

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From-the-Heart Parenting, Inc., is a non-profit organization that promotes parenting awareness and engages parents, parent educators, and the public in the process of raising children and young adults who are mentally, emotionally, and spiritually healthy by gathering and making available relevant parenting information and support resources, and providing accessible, quality parenting education that strengthens parenting skills and knowledge. The goal is to make the journey of parenting a life-long rewarding experience that culminates in wholesome relationships for the child, the parent, the family, and our society.

Sources:

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