

We're responsible for shaping our youth

Written by Mark Pavilons

Like its politicians and its war, society has the teenagers it deserves.

J. B. Priestley

In many ways, we are all teenagers. Some of us grow out of it, and others don't.

Priestley is quite right when he observes that teens are a product of their environment. We planted the seeds, nurtured them and let them grow. The end result is a reflection of whether or not we, as a society, have a green thumb. Like rare, exotic plants, our kids need all the ingredients to grow and flourish and it's up to us to be their committed gardeners.

Teens in every generation are criticized for being a handful; for taxing their parents and being challenging young adults. These qualities haven't changed in centuries.

What has changed is how we help them; encourage them and train them to be the stewards of tomorrow.

Parents are on the front lines and we have a responsibility – perhaps greater today than ever before – to be better, more creative, more supportive.

My wife mentioned to me that I can't be their best friend, pal or 'cool dad.' We have to be their parent. I guess some of us are trying to change the way we parent, in light of our own parents' lack of knowledge and expertise. We want our kids to like us and think we're amazing.

And yet, that's not our job. My wife says I'm as immature as my kids at times, so I need to grow up and be a leader, mentor and rock-solid provider. I need to lead by example.

I can be strict and don't mind being the 'bad guy' at times. Sometimes my kids ask me why I'm being tough and I tell them 'it's my job.' Either that, or I tell them to ask their mom!

But she's right of course.

By setting a strong example at the home front will we impact their development. We need to be loving spouses, providers, hard workers and tutors, all the things they require to blossom and bloom.

We also need to be involved.

My wife takes that very seriously.

She knows where the kids are ALL the time. She makes them check in. She wants to know every detail about what they're doing and who they're with.

Yes, it's invasive and kind of 'in your face,' but her intentions are sound.

She makes it her job to know what they're watching on Netflix, and what content they're downloading. She watches their posts, texts and Tweets. She may be annoying, but they sure know she's watching and she cares.

My parents were quite relaxed in that department. However, they both instilled in me, at a young age, the importance of respecting my parents; doing household chores; being responsible and contributing to the household.

They made me respect their rules and they made it known precisely whose house it was. They were clear as to what types of behaviour were not tolerated.

Those qualities have remained within me to this day, and they are important.

Where my wife backs off is when I direct my kids to do simple chores; keep their rooms clean; give us some notice when they need a ride, etc. I want them to develop good habits, habits that will be necessary in the real world.

But then I think about the real world and its drawbacks.

Teachers are really busy these days, sometimes too busy to pay attention to individual students. Lessons are done quickly, and homework is done online. They seldom have time for one-on-one help after class.

This alone can leave kids frustrated and challenged. As good as I am in certain areas, I'm not a teacher and I can't always explain everything to my kids. Sure, I can help with reading comprehension, essays and writing style, but again, these skills don't come easily. And I am often left scratching my head when we get a C!

One teacher deducts marks for indenting paragraphs!

Two of my children are not taught cursive writing, so they won't be able to sign their names, without some guidance. They question the value of topics taught in school and the bearing these things will have later in life.

They're great at questioning everything. But an inquiring mind is a very good quality. My son doesn't accept the comeback, because you have to when it comes to school assignments.

Bill Gates, Richard Branson, Houdini, Einstein, Johnny Depp, Sir Elton John, Simon Cowell, Walt Disney all hated school and dropped out early.

As I mentioned, we need to recognize the harsh realities of the world today.

We all know that violence wasn't as prevalent 20 years ago. Two decades ago, kids didn't carry knives and stab each other in parking lots. Twenty years ago, road rage was uncommon. Kids seldom used the f-word and would never tell an adult to go to hell.

I am fully aware of the demands on parents today. My wife has two jobs. Our days are long and we're often tired by 9 p.m.

Car repairs and patio furniture are the furthest things from our minds. Our eldest is juggling volunteer work, a part-time job and her university studies. Our boy is still burdened with future career plans. Our youngest is entering her teen years.

Just as our teens and young adults are fearless about asking questions, we should do our best to answer each and every one of them.

We have to be vigilant and on our toes. We have to remain involved. We have to show them how much we care!