

April 2010
Sent to Peel Region Print Media

Dear Letter to the Editor,

The recent stabbings across the GTA involving youth on both ends of the blade are disturbing not only to parents and community leaders, but to us young people too.

Now more than ever it is critical that parents and teens connect and learn from each other what it means to grow up as a young person in today's world. Easier said than done with generation, cultural and communication gaps making it a daunting task – but that doesn't mean we should give up trying.

Teens are not always open to adult attempts to engage them in discussion. We're used to parents talking down to us, lecturing and telling us what to do. By the time a parent gets around to asking us what we think or where we're at, many of us have stopped sharing our stories, feelings and opinions.

Young people look to parents to be role models – imperfections and all. We need adults that we can trust for guidance and support – especially when the bumps in the road become potholes.

Research shows that open communication between parents and teens is crucial to the healthy development of young people between the ages of 12 to 19 years. Open communication means being available day and night, reaching compromises, not passing judgement, really listening - even when it's stuff you're not comfortable hearing about, being aware of interests, friends, hang-outs and whereabouts.

It's been proven that teens benefit from positive reinforcement of family values, and the setting of expectations and limits, such as insisting on honesty, self-control and respect for others, while still allowing space to grow. Parents need to lead by example and show teens ways to solve problems without using violence.

What does it take to raise a teenager today? It takes parents and young people working with politicians, teachers, police officers, religious leaders, and health and social services providers to minimize risks, bridge gaps and nurture a safe and supportive community.

It takes open communication replacing the anger, fear and the knives that threaten the future of our young people.

Let's come together as a community should to engage each other and prevent youth violence.

Join us online at www.voice4peelyouth.ca

IMPACT Youth Group
Peel Youth Violence Prevention Network