

## Let's Get to Know our Youth

Youth, in English, refers to individuals between 12 to 24 years of age. In some cases, the range can be extended up to 29 years of age. The term "youth" in Korean however, does not have a definite and accurate meaning attached to its respective translation. In the Korean community, those considered teenagers are below 18 years of age, whereas young adults are considered to be from the ages of 19 and above. However, in discussion of both the adolescent and young adult populous, the term "youth" will be used in order to prevent confusion.

Working in the counselling field for nearly 35 years, since my admission to the Graduate School of Social Work in Korea, I have always been interested in the relational dynamics between parents and their children. It is a constant subject of question to me, knowing the extent of a parents' insight on to their children's lives and the ways in which Korean-Canadian parents would know their children. Throughout my time as a counsellor, when such questions are raised, parents often respond with "If a parent does not know their child, then who does?" followed by claims from such parents stating that they know their children best.

Occasionally, however, there are some parents who admit that although they are the ones who gave birth to their children, they sometimes have absolutely no idea about what goes on in the lives of their children.

Often times, parents come to believe that if their children simply obey their rules and do well in school, the child would have no problems. Therefore, as parents, they would have no need to delve deeper into understanding their child for there is nothing more that they need to know about their children. The danger that such a perception enables, however, is that should the parents of a child become aware of the difficulties and barriers that children face in this society, much has already occurred in the child's mental, emotional, and physical life that parents are only left with the realization of their ignorance towards their children's realities and the regret of not having taken the time to truly understand them.

It is important for parents to question their knowledge about the lives and the role of children in this society; not only the identity of their children, but the difficulties that children must learn to adapt to and the pressure of ways in which they must do so. I have discovered that immigrant parents, in particular, tend to build walls dividing the reality of the society youth must live in, adhering firmly to former values, attitudes, and ways of living, while foregoing the opportunity to truly understand and communicate with their own children.

Despite such barriers, parents are still well-meaning, wishing for their children to live well and become successful. However, this raises the questions, what does it mean to live well? For most parents, living well alludes to becoming well-educated with a high level profession, a big house, and a nice car. Only when such things are obtained, parents find satisfaction within their children's lives.

While children understand that the expectations and demands placed upon them by their parents are inherently well-meaning, they are often left confused about how to live well in accordance to their parents' definition of success. Under the pressure of attaining a version of what it means to live well through their parents' expectations, while attempting to develop a sense of self despite potentially encountering backlash from their parents, can be so upsetting that children either deny the lives their parents' promote or live by them in constant difficulty.

Considering the struggles of our youth, the most desirable environment parents can give to their children during such a sensitive period in life, is one of stability and safety. Instead of comparing and demanding from their children, parents must foster a home environment that offers youth a space to develop their vision of personal success and obtain that according to their learned strengths and potentials.

Recently, I attended a parent conference at one of the Ontario private schools private schools. During the conference, a young vice-principal presented recent research material on education which contradicted the traditional thoughts of parents. Expectantly, many parents had objections and questions that were combative in nature. One of the things that the young vice-principal stated was that a child's level of attention is most high during the afternoon, therefore, classes should be held during then. Moreover, the most essential and important thing for students to learn, are teamwork and social skills which, he proposed, are best

developed by participating in various sports activities and volunteer work in the community. Additionally, rather than just studying, youth must engage in group activities as much as possible.

Most of the parents, who were white, objected such research, seeming to want their children to get up a little earlier and study rather than get up later and focus on sports, socializing, and group activities.

Research states that youth these days are socially isolated. According to the vice principal's research, today's youth spends most of their time alone, some time with their friends, and the least amount of time with their parents and guardians. In spite of this, youth have expressed the desire for quality time with adults and parental figures. Additionally, the vice principal mentioned that 18% of the student body showed difficulty in concentrating while studying, 11% suffered from depression and mental difficulties, and 71% had difficulty sleeping due to cellphone and computer use. Unlike the generation of their parents, children have the ability to do many things at once, but tire and bore quickly. Today's youth seldom explores the things they do not know or feel uncomfortable with. The principal stated that the youth of today enjoy less adventure than they once did. Finally, the principal emphasized that it is more important for adults to teach today's youth how to live happy and healthy, wisely.

Considering the lack of communication between most parents and their children, it is nearly impossible to believe that all parents genuinely and accurately understand all the complexities that make up a child and the society they live by. Furthermore, given the lack of insight most parents have on their children, how can anything be done with regards to the obstacles, barriers, and struggles that youth face?

Although most parents commonly seek counselling to assist their children with their various difficulties, only a small portion of the youth who experience neglect or are dealing with crises truly have the opportunity to be counselled. The reason for this is because the difficulties that youth face, as members of society and within the family unit, are not always visible. Therefore, the responsibility lies on the parents of today's youth to provide as many opportunities as possible for their children to express themselves.

Many may ask, how can we help children express themselves? According to the results of a survey conducted by For You Telecare Family Service (FUTFS), our youth are most interested in sports, recreational activities, and have a preference for cultural activities. Physical activity, the arts, and cultural activities are indispensable to the emotional enrichment, creativity, and the development of a positive outlook for youth. To truly brighten the future of their children, parents must actively seek emotional and mental outlets for their children to create, as well as provide opportunities and experiences that fully demonstrate the abilities and qualities of their children, rather than forcing them down a narrow, solitary road of studying.

There is no denying that the role of a parent is not an easy one to play. It is a role that requires an excessive amount of patience, selflessness, love, and forgiveness. Thus, it is important to bear in that the responsibility that parents have in understanding and communicating with their children does not absolve youth of the responsibility to extend similar efforts to communicate and understand their parents and elders. Children must understand that there are difficulties their parents face, especially as immigrants, and how much their parents have sacrificed for the betterment of their lives.

In particular, Korean parents are not very expressive with their love. This may be attributed to being the descendant to a generation of parents who, too, have lived without expressing affection. Additionally, this inability to express love and affection may be the result of the generation gap between the old and the young which rapidly expands due to the differing languages and cultures.

Nevertheless, it is imperative that parents and children understand each other. While it may be impossible for both parents and children to know the depths of each other's hearts, they must still learn to love and live with each other in spite of the obstacles and changing times. Above all, as a Korean - Canadian community, we must all work together towards a brighter and wholesome vision that, with the collective efforts, will inevitably manifest before us.