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We all have a role to play in creating a crime-free society

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THE recent surge of youth violence and criminal activities indicates the moral degradation of youth in alarming proportions. We had been following the incidents of cold-blooded murder, sodomy and brutal rape of babies and children, which only reinstate that our society has graduated to violence of horrifying bestiality.

There were cases where female children were sexually assaulted by their fathers who are indeed responsible for their protection. For these animals of lust, I recommend the gallows. Deep emotional wounds inflicted on these vulnerable victims have left them scarred for life.

Today our society is beset with various social maladies like murder, rape, cult-like behaviour, dadah abuse, broken homes, child abuse, lepak, vandalism, street demonstrations and truancy. Enactment of stiffer penalties as deterrence to violent crimes is the need of the hour.

Youths are the bedrock of our society and country. These leaders of tomorrow need to channel all their energies towards academic and intellectual pursuits. It is time we took measures in response to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's call for character education of youth.

We need to raise a violence-free child to create a crime-free society. Violence is a learned behaviour and hence is preventable. No single cause is identified but a host of factors influences delinquent behaviour in our children.

The most important contributing factor is the absence of a nurturing and supportive home environment. "It takes a village to raise a child" is a maxim. In the absence of extended families, children are left to be cared by maids and day-care centres. Parents are busy fulfilling their financial and emotional need to work. They are unable to shoulder their roles and responsibilities in this increasingly complex society and are thus overburdened and lost.

They also lack parental skills and competence. "Attachment" or "emotional connection" with one's parent(s) is paramount for children to survive physically and psychologically. Children thus connected grow up feeling more secure, cope well with harsh realities and show empathy towards others.

Lack of parental supervision, chronic conflict between parents, domestic violence and child abuse are the other family-level risk factors contributing to violence.

Schools provide a haven for learning. A greater attachment to teachers fosters healthy learning. However, academic failures and truancy can promote delinquent behaviour. Community-level factors are drug abuse, gangs, parental unemployment, low socio-economic status and lack of pro-social role models.

Exposure to violence in motion pictures, television, music videos contribute to aggressive behaviour and desensitisation to violence in children and adolescents.

Prevention is better than cure. Violent behaviour can be prevented by building up resiliency and reducing or eliminating the risk factors stated above. Parents should supervise their children's activities and spend quality time with them.

Children learn by example. Parents must, therefore, resort to healthy ways of problem-solving and be positive role models worthy of emulation by

their children.

Parents should monitor the sites their children visit on the Internet as they have easy access to smut material. Children must be encouraged to watch educational and other programmes suitable for their viewing that facilitate creativity and thinking.

Alternatively, they can engage themselves in sports, hobbies, reading and other recreational activities for all-round development.

Schools provide an opportunity to identify young people who are potentially at risk. Teachers must be vigilant in detecting negative behaviour among students.

Parents need to focus on character education and emotional intelligence to strengthen basic values such as honesty, integrity, courage, self-esteem, esteem for others, perseverance, kindness and compassion. This will help them become good citizens and ensure a safer tomorrow.

Parents and teachers can offer guidance regarding conflict resolution, parameters of acceptable social behaviour, impulse control, anger management, systematic problem-solving mechanisms and development of self-control.

Children can be educated to value human differences relating to gender, race and age. Non-violent methods of problem-solving must be rewarded with praise and be encouraged. A positive approach to introduce a behavioural change is to emphasise rewards of good behaviour instead of punishment to bad behaviour.

Parents, educationalists, community leaders and law enforcement authorities, as a cohesive workforce, need to take comprehensive measures to curb violence at its source. Let us rear a violence-free child and make crime-free society a reality.