

6/12/12

Proper parenting makes the difference

By Paul Chabot

Bill Cosby once said, "I guess the real reason that my wife and I had children is the same reason that Napoleon had for invading Russia: it seemed like a good idea at the time." A humorous thought, that I'm sure has slipped into the mind of parents everywhere — but sadly, many honestly feel this way, and allow their children to become the victim of poor parenting.

There is no greater responsibility of a parent than to properly raise a child; there is no greater responsibility of a community than to ensure the "community" is safe for that parent to raise their child. While the occasional success story can be found when just one of these circumstances is apparent, it's hard to find statistics on successful children when both are lacking.

Raising a child is no easy task — especially today. But because of the times we live in, proper parenting and strong community values are more essential now than ever before. If a parent doesn't raise their child, then more likely than not, the surrounding community will — and if that community is infested with gangs and drugs, the negative outcome is virtually certain.

Having served as a commissioner for the State Parole Board, I learned a great deal about how criminals ended up behind bars. When one takes into consideration their childhood, it shouldn't be a surprise. We are all born innocent, but some children are sentenced at birth because their par-

ent(s) failed them, abused them and/or left them — I often wished the parents could have been sentenced along with their grown children. None of this excuses the crimes they committed, but rather is intended for us to realize that in order to reduce the problems of crime and violence, it begins in the home; it begins with the parent; it begins with a community conversation about tough love, responsibility and accountability.

How dire of a situation are we in? Although drug use is about 40 percent lower than a generation ago, since 2008, youth drug use rates are skyrocketing.

We have more gang members on the streets of America than police officers.

Compared to the 1990s (when a third of Americans were born out of wedlock), now 41 percent of babies don't have married parents. And 21 percent of kids live in poverty.

Every hour a baby is born from a mother addicted to drugs.

A parent is a role-model. If parents abuse their spouse, odds are the child too will abuse their future partner. If a parent uses drugs, odds are their child will too. Kids replicate the good and the bad.

God bless single parents who place their child's interest first, including a safe and disciplined upbringing. These single parents are on the front lines, doing all they can based on life's circumstances but finding ways to ensure their child succeeds.

Parents, it's not up to the school to raise your child — it's up to you! If a cop brings home your kid or your kid

is written up at school, never say "not my child." Get your head out of the sand — 1 in 4 high school students uses illegal drugs and odds are yours know exactly who they are — they may even be one of "them."

Parents, where are you when your PTA meets? Membership overall is at an all-time low. If you don't make your kids' education a priority, why should they feel any different?

Parents, drug test your kids — it's cheap and can save their life, and it gives them an "out" when asked by a peer to try drugs. Many school districts (congrats to Redlands) are subscribing to non-punitive drug testing and those who do see drug use drop.

Parents, don't be your child's best friend — be their "parent." Parents, have dinner with your kids, at the table. Research shows families that eat dinner together have fewer problems.

Parents, what else are your children involved with other than school? Research shows you need to give them an "anti-drug" — an activity to absorb their afterschool time like sports or Boy Scouts. Kids who have too much free time, especially in gang-infested cities, often gravitate toward the negative elements.

Learning is a lifetime responsibility. My hat's off to the families who stay together, or the single parent doing all they can to ensure their child's well-being is the focus of their life.

Paul R. Chabot, Ed.D., MPA is president of the Coalition for a Drug Free California and a former commissioner of the State Parole Board. He served as senior advisor in the White House under President Clinton and President Bush and is the author of "Eternal Battle against Evil."