

# Understanding

Toronto YFC



## TODAY'S YOUTH

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### Youth Culture Facts:

- 50% of kids age 8-15 have their own TV
- 75% of kids in grades 7-10 view restricted movies at home
- 26% of kids age 8-15 have their own computer hooked to Internet
- top videos for boys grades 3-6 include the ultra-violent Grand Theft Auto

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## Birthdays Without Pressure

If you haven't noticed, birthday parties are getting more expensive. It used to be that a few hotdogs, pop, cake, loot bags, and some simple games would do. However, as with most things in our culture, extremism is the latest trend. How much are you willing to pay?

One of the latest shows to help put things over the top is MTV's "My Super Sweet 16." The show features in detail some of the most expensive birthday parties in America. Parents are expected to, and often do, shell out tens of thousands of dollars for what used to be a simple celebration. Birthday parties used to focus on the one celebrating but today many have stylish themes, excessive gifts, and live concerts from the kid's favourite bands. For the average parent, the real problem is the "trickle down effect" - everyone is expected to provide something more lavish!



There are many companies in Toronto that specialize in trendy birthday celebrations were a parent can quickly drop a few thousand dollars. The hard part for some parents is having to outdo the last party their child attended. Conspicuous consumption is

the name of the game. Extravagant parties are yet another way for some parents to flaunt success while others see it is a "guilt offering" for not spending time with their kids.

**Birthdays Without Pressure** ([www.birthdayswithoutpressure.org](http://www.birthdayswithoutpressure.org)) outlines a number of implications of this growing trend for parents. One,

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they feel pressured to "make" their child "happy" by meeting escalating community standards for parties. Two, they feel guilty if their party was below the community standards they don't really agree with. Three, parents feel overloaded with "too much stuff" which they have to manage, organize, and clean up. Four, they regret or resent afterwards when their child, or others, is not appreciative. Five, parents often run up significant debts from running their own parties or buying gifts for other parties. Six, parents often experience marital stress when they cannot agree on how to do the big party and how to carry it off.

If you want to avoid the pressure and get some great ideas on ideas on running reasonable birthday parties, check out Birthdays Without Pressure.

# The Great Family Meltdown

**A recent report from The Vanier Institute of the Family “Contemporary Family Trends” (CFT) focuses on the growing number of Canadian children and adolescents who exhibit problematic behaviours. They conclude that society in general has changed to a society which favors the development of problematic rather than prosocial behaviours. How have we moved from a culture of nurture to a culture of abandonment?**



**THE STUDY IDENTIFIES SIX FACTORS IN PARTICULAR THAT HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THESE CHANGES:**

## 1 Parenting Issues

As family structures change, so has parenting. In some cases, single parents are left on their own to deal with difficult children. Many additional studies show the negative effect for kids growing up without fathers. In other situations, the growing trend of “permissive” parents produce more and more young people pushing the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. Busy parents spend less time with children while meeting the demands of one and two jobs. All these family permutations lead to less structured and supervised time with kids which in turn can lead to troubling behaviours.

Statistics show that the divorce rate has decreased slightly since the 1980s along with more and more couples choosing cohabitation. There has also been a decrease in births to single mothers since 2000. However, studies still show that children are at greater risk for behavioural and emotional challenges than those being raised in a two-parent family. A disproportionate number of delinquents still come from single-parent homes.

## 2 Peer Orientation

In the growing absence of parents, either through work or family breakdown, friends become the surrogate family. Peers, thanks to a multitude of technological ways to stay connected, can influence greatly the beliefs, behaviours, and attitudes of even the youngest child. As Neufeld and Mate point out, peers may well have become the substitute family but they do not have the wisdom, patience, and skills of real parents. In most cases we end up with the blind leading the blind.

Peer orientation is also a major concern because it comes at a time when adolescents are seeking a break from parental control. It's called “growing up.” As a result of absentee parenting, for whatever the reason, many young people are looking for direction in life from friends, not family. Such guidance begins to explain why so many of our young people now struggle with a variety of issues.

## 3 Affluence

An affluent neighborhood does not automatically mean kids without problems. Over the past few years, a growing number of at-risk youth are emerging from these areas. Often times there are no effective adult communities in place as some parents are largely absent, permissive and uninvolved. This provides young people with ample opportunities to hang out in hot cars, experiment with sex and drugs at home, throw parties, and be involved in other types of problematic behavior. All of these are signs that well-intentioned parents are failing to pass on values of civility to their children.

Other parents give their children material things rather than time. Caught up in consumerism, some parents think that just providing their kids with all the toys the world has to offer will solve their problems. Nothing could be further from the truth. Kids long for meaningful relationships with their parents.

## Quality of Schools

CFT also looked at child socialization in the classroom and teacher influence. Children attending schools with a high ratio of difficult peers are at a much greater risk of developing similar patterns. Schools are working harder to keep the problem kids in the classroom which in turn has a negative effect on both peers and teachers.

Added to this problem is the growing stress this brings into the life of teachers. Schools seem to be getting larger with more and more difficult students. It takes its toll on teachers as more days are lost to stress and finding supply teachers is a growing challenge. Even the most effective, compassionate teacher can feel overwhelmed with peripheral issues beyond their control.

CFT also questions if classrooms have become too unstructured. Children spend much less time sitting in rows and being taught directly as a class by their teachers. Working in teams and independent research is the latest trend. It fosters a rugged sense of individualism while offering little responsibility directly to the person in authority.

## Quality of Neighborhoods

It comes as no surprise that where a child grows up significantly impacts their development. Generally speaking, areas of high employment and stability tend to produce youth with fewer social problems while lower income neighborhoods have a higher risk for problematic behaviours. Too often children that are both poor and beset by social problems are not adequately socialized especially when the parents are poor and often working long hours to support the children they so dearly love. In Vancouver, one study showed that in terms of general child development, in a typical affluent community, 15% of children are vulnerable compared to 50% in low-income areas.

## Media Influences

Although the influence of media on kids is debated at the academic level, kids themselves readily admit they are influenced by what they see and hear. In a similar media study from the American Psychological Association on the sexualization of girls ([www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org)), the APA lays out in detail the contributions of media, music, lyrics, television and movies when it comes to depicting women and young girls in a sexualizing manner. Too many of these messages encourage little girls to dress sexy and act sexy if they want the attention of the opposite sex. All of this becomes problematic when they engage in the natural sexual activities one would expect. For example, the Canadian government recently announced the need to vaccinate all girls age 9-13 for HPV in order to protect them the chances of cervical cancer.

The mind of any child under 12 years of age can be very undiscerning and susceptible to all kinds of wrong messages. Kids at this age tend to believe whatever they see and hear. This is not an issue if you're a parent actively involved in the life of your child but it also poses a danger to young ones who mindlessly consume media for hours on end. Whether the message is sex, violence, or consumerism, our youth are at risk of making bad decisions. Every child watching TV is spending time with strangers whose morals and values may be significantly different from the ones at home.



**What does this all mean for parents trying to do their best to raise healthy children? Even the "best of" families are faced with daily decisions and challenges.**

**Youth Unlimited would like to offer the following suggestions:**

**FIRST**, parents need to make their children a priority. It is easy to say it but hard to live it out. Life is busy and there are so many other things that scream for our attention. However, none will pay the dividends a solid relationship with your kids will. If you want to raise a happy family, the price will be your time and focus.

**SECOND**, parents need to remember the constant culture war we wage with the media. Teaching kids to mindfully critique their media choices is a wonderful skill to pass on to your children. Most children and teens mindlessly consume everything they see and hear without considering its affect upon them. Their worldview and consequently their values and beliefs are molded by media. For helpful seminars on this and other cultural issues, check out [www.paulrobertson.ca](http://www.paulrobertson.ca).

**THIRD**, spend time eating as a family. Research shows that families that eat together stay together. It is not the magic of the food but rather the conversations that make a family strong. Studies show that any family that has 5 or more meals together per week is more likely to produce kids who develop strong pro-social behaviours.

**FINALLY**, teach your kids right from wrong and the rewards that come with being a person of character and integrity. In a culture steeped in moral relativism, many of our kids are struggling to live lives of truth. Society says "do whatever you want" while deep down inside they know there is a right way to live. Media won't teach it to our kids so parents need to walk closely with them until such time as we can set them free.

Our country may well be in a family meltdown phase but that doesn't mean we need to abandon hope. As adults we are more than capable of countering the culture. The only question is - will we?

# Children Deserve the Whole Truth on Global Warming

Kids now fear global warming more than cancer, car crashes, and terrorism. Alarm over dying polar bears and entire countries being submerged by rising ocean levels can now be added to the growing list of things that should terrify our children. The list already contains AIDS, HPV, kidnappings, West Nile virus, SARS, mad cow disease, terrorism, sexual predators, online stalkers, school intruders, and obesity just to name a

lypse, we should be concerned about the impact on their emotional health.

A recent study in Great Britain reported that half of young children are anxious about the effects of global warming with many of them losing sleep because of their concern. The most feared consequences of global warming included poor health, the possible submergence of complete countries and the welfare of animals. Children are exposed to the same

*What does that do the psyche of a 13 year old already struggling with life? Nothing good that's for sure."*

We all need to do our part in keeping the environment, and our children, healthy. In an issue of such importance, it appears that one-side of the debate has been largely silenced by those in control of the media. There are always two sides to any debate.

Here are some other additional facts to consider when speaking to your children about the issue:

- \* The number one thing that determines earth's temperature is the sun. Recent research shows it is burning warmer than at any time in the last 1,000 years.
  - \* Villages flourished on the south shore of Greenland between 800 - 1300 AD with 20' trees, bushes, and vineyards. It was called Greenland to attract more Europeans to move there.
  - \* Most of Antarctica is getting colder while all you hear is about melting polar caps at the North pole
  - \* The media only recently abandoned the "global cooling" scare of the early 1980s
  - \* Global warming hasn't made hurricanes worse; no hurricane hit the USA in 2006
  - \* Canadian scientists say polar bears are not going extinct or even appear to be affected at present
- For more information on the other side of the dispute, check out *"The Politically Incorrect Guide to Global Warming and Environmentalism"* by Christopher C. Horner.



few. For most parents, these items were not even on the radar when they were kids.

When it comes to getting the whole truth on global warming, our children are getting the short end of the stick. We all value truth; teaching it to our kids from an early age. We expect others to be honest with our children. However, one has to question if this is "true" in the overwhelmingly emotional debate on global warming. Adults and children alike have been inundated with only one side of the debate and it is our children who are caught in the crossfire. As more and more of our kids are exposed to global warnings, from Al Gore's "An Inconvenient Truth" to daily threats of the coming apoca-

hard-hitting facts as adults and many struggle to make sense of it all. For younger children with undeveloped minds, seeing is believing. They are unable to put into proper context the dramatic images they are exposed to. Many feel a sense of guilt as well as fear. This might explain why some have nightmares in the days following vivid presentations offered at school.

One mother who is already dealing with a number of issues with her son stated in an email to Youth Unlimited, "... he doesn't care what he does to himself - no hope at all. He has been doing a unit in geography on global warming and the scientists seem to be in agreement that if nothing changes, the world will fall apart in 30 years.



**Paul Robertson** is the Youth Culture Specialist and Director of Church and Family Resources for Youth Unlimited.

More culture info: [www.paulrobertson.ca](http://www.paulrobertson.ca)