From the Premier

Mental Health Matters

First of all, let me congratulate the YouthNews team for its decision to focus on the most important topic of mental health this month.

We live in a place of pastel-colored homes, blue waters and pink sand. The beach is never more than five minutes away and friends are even closer. These daily advantages of living in Bermuda disguise the fact that many adults, teens, and children find it hard to cope with the stresses of life. We tend to quickly attend to our physical pains, but we often ignore our emotional and mental wellbeing.

Society places far too much value on physical attributes, but it is as important to remember that one's mental health is part of one's overall wellbeing. Steps should be taken to preserve it in much the same way we preserve and monitor our physical health with regular trips to the doctor, eating well, and getting adequate levels of exercise. According to mental health experts, there is a definite link between our physical, mental and emotional selves.

When we observe that people are different we often make judgments and these judgments can be negative and prejudiced. Attitudes about people with mental illness occur because we lack knowledge or education about mental health disorders. Our assumptions about people with a psychiatric diagnosis tend to be inaccurate and not based on fact. For instance, many people believe that mental illness is a sign of weakness in an individual or as a result of laziness or a lack of will power.

A person's mental health influences their self-image, self-esteem, mood, energy, attention, and their interactions with the outside world. Mental health, like physical health, is important at every stage of life. When untreated, mental health concerns can lead to school failure, family conflicts, sexual promiscuity, drug abuse, and/or violence.

Mental illness is not a sign of weakness - even the strongest of individuals have a fairly strong chance at some point in their life of developing a mental disorder. If you know of anyone, in your neighbourhood or at school, suffering mental ailments, please regard them with compassion. Most such illnesses are treatable.

Finally, understand that there are steps you can take to be in the best shape mentally and emotionally. This is not a matter of shame or pride, but rather of quality of life. Seek information and help from your families and from professionals such as doctors, school counselors and/or teachers. The "Helping Services" section of the blue pages in the phone book is also a helpful resource to find the appropriate service to meet your mental health needs.

Thank you and remember that Mental Health Matters.

The Hon. W. Alexander Scott, JP, MP

OUR VIEW

Bully Beginnings

MacKinnon Eldridge *Cynnara Phillips*

Bullying has always been with us. But how does such an antisocial behavior begin? We see the effects of it often, but we don't see the cause. A large amount of the problem comes from poor, or no, role models in the home. The child may begin to learn how to act from seeing parents' frustration. They can also learn this from watching adults, who are involved in activities like drinking, smoking and violence. It can also be learned from the media. When a child sees people committing crimes on the news or in movies, there should be someone there to explain that it is wrong. If not, criminal activity becomes moral to the child. Without someone to teach the basic moral standards of right and wrong, or at least behavior, the child is endangered.

If the child comes from an empty home without a family influence, the child may fall into bad company. When a small child hangs out with a rough crowd, he is exposed to violence and illegal actions, while being told that it is not wrong. This can corrupt the thoughts of a youth.

Bullies are often the previous targets of older bullies. When this happens the child begins to progressively show aggressive and negative behavior toward other, in order to survive. So, if in kindergarten or nursery, a child is picked on or is left out, then as time goes on he will show the same king of actions towards his peers.

Bullying is not a natural part of childhood. To prove this, studies show children who participate in bullying are four times as likely to be incarcerated for crimes as non-bullies.

"Bullying is a real problem in EVERY school. It may not seem like it is, because the youth of Bermuda do not say anything. It's at Clearwater, where I go to school. If you do a simple thing, such as write a story and get it published, some students will tease you for it.

I interviewed a teacher at school and this is how he felt: "Bullies find people who they think they can intimidate. In other words they find people who they think will be afraid of them. However if the person stands up to them they back off and intimidate someone else."

A Matter of Debate: UNIFORMS

by Azzura Lalani

PROS

A uniform helps to create a strong sense of school ethos and a sense of belonging to a particular community. As such it promotes discipline and helps to drive up academic standards, which is why a uniform is often adopted by schools, which are being reopened with a fresh start, after being classified as failing.

A uniform level s the social playing field, so that all students are equal in the eyes of the school and of each other. In institutions without a uniform ,students are often competitive and worry endlessly about their appearance and the clothes they should wear. Pupils without expensive designer clothes and trainers may be singled out as social outcasts, or stigmatised as being from poor backgrounds. For these reasons, many parents prefer uniforms, as they save them money on buying clothes for school wear.

A uniform has practical benefits when students are outside the school building. Being readily identified with a particular institution may make students more aware of their behaviour while travelling to and from the school, leading them to act more considerately, e.g. to other passengers on buses or trains. On organised trips away from the school, it is much easier for teachers to ensure they haven't lost anyone and to monitor behaviour, than if students wore their own clothes and blended in with the crowds.

A uniform prepares students for life after education, when most will be expected to dress smartly and appropriately for work, adhering to a corporate dress code.

A uniform makes it easy to check that every student maintains a smart appearance and is dressed appropriately for their classes. In schools where students are allowed to dress as they like, in practice, a constant battle has to be fought by staff to ensure that what the students choose to wear is not inappropriate, e.g. because it is too revealing, features T-shirts with offensive slogans, would be dangerous while performing scientific experiments, etc.

CONS

A uniform suppresses individualism and treats students en masse rather than encouraging teachers to recognise their different characters and abilities, and students to accept responsibility for aspects of their own lives. A uniform was better suited to an age of rote learning and military-style discipline than to the more exploratory and creative values of modern education values which are increasingly important to the wider economy. Many schools, indeed many countries, manage to maintain high school standards of discipline, community and academic performance without adopting uniform.

Students always find ways to tease or bully others, regardless of what clothes are worn. Those who wish to be particularly fashionable will want to own the same number of outfits regardless of whether they are allowed to wear them to school or not, changing into them the minute that classes are over. Parents often find some uniform items, e.g. jackets, very expensive compared to the rest of their child's wardrobe, and complain they can never be worn outside the school environment.

A uniform makes students very identifiable and emphasises the divisions between schools, making it very easy for bullying and fights to develop between students from rival institutions as they travel to and from school.

The business world is increasingly relaxed about dress codes, making those schools that insist on uniform increasingly anachronistic. Adults who attended schools without uniform do not appear to struggle in the workplace.

Often it is a uniform that is inappropriate, being too cold in winter or too hot in summer, largely because it is badly designed and cheaply-produced in small quantities for a captive market. Girls in particular complain at being forced to wear skirts even in the coldest months, when many would generally wear trousers from choice and some, e.g. Muslims, for cultural reasons. Students will always attempt to subvert any dress code, strict or lenient, requiring staff vigilance in any case.

Rainy day stuff ...

10 Different Things To Do When You Are Bored

1. Write a play
2. Give yourself a facial
3. Practice an instrument
4. Call your grandmother
5. Bake a cake
6. Write a handwritten letter
7. Give your dog a bath
8. Clean your local beaches
9. Sing a song
10. Learn yoga