

Gang Violence: Dads Need to be Present

Every time our youth is murdered or in the news related to gang-violence, we shake our heads. We may even look around to see where the blame can be placed. But little introspection comes afterward.

In my work with at-risk or crime-entrenched youth, one glaring common factor is present- the absence of emotionally present fathers. Sure, these youth usually have their dads in their lives. But often these dads are not emotionally available to their kids. We can blame a number of factors for this phenomenon- and yes, it’s a **phenomenon** in the South Asian community. I fully acknowledge that there are systemic issues also at play which disproportionally target immigrant, minority, and marginalized communities. However, we must also address our own accountability.

We can attribute their emotional absence to the way they were raised and the void of an expressed emotional bond with their fathers. We can blame the rat-race, which is justified by “I want the best for my kids, so I work as hard as I can”. Along this line, we can witness the “keeping up the Joneses” mentality which is so pervasive in our community- a consequence of the competitive capitalism under which we exist.

Material goods can never replace emotional presence. What’s more, material goods are utterly useless in the wake of losing a child to the streets. We need to redefine *provider* and we need to start providing our kids with real connection and love, not with love that’s bought and paid for.

We need to be **emotionally accountable** to our kids.

How?

Be there for your child. Spend time speaking with them and trying to understand them. This requires work- real work. Listening to their concerns and validating their emotions is not easy for those who come from homes in which healthy emotional expression wasn’t taught or valued.

But if you want to connect, you will have to suspend judgements and relinquish the traditional parent-child power dynamic to a degree. See them as their own individuals; as sovereign beings. Come from a place of love, not control. Be their guide, not their god. Be available, but also respect their need for space.

Understand your own issues around emotional expression and do the work you need to. Parents who carry emotional baggage or intergenerational trauma often pass unhealthy patterns onto their kids. Recognize your issues and get support around them.

Socio-politically speaking, one of the most effective (and insidious) ways to subordinate a population is to render their leadership ineffective. We may be rendering ourselves ineffective by not creating and maintaining strong emotional bonds with our children. Kids longing for connection and attachment are vulnerable prey to those looking to exploit these kids. Leadership within the home- based on **love, trust, and compassion**- can provide the enduring emotional connections youth need. **Let this be our legacy**.

We need to do better as fathers and break unhealthy patterns if we want the next generation(s) to prosper. It’s a matter of life and death in some cases.

To the dads already emotionally present in their children’s lives: THANK YOU!

To the moms doing the best they can: THANK YOU!

To the big brothers and sisters (biological or not) doing the best they can: THANK YOU!

-Vijay S Mann, RCC

