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## Mentor our children

Quebec has the most fearful parents in the country, 148% more fearful for their children than the Canadian average. That disturbing statistic emerges from a recent VoxPop survey for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada. The survey, conducted as a public service by the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association, ranked the top 10 fears of Canadian parents for their children.

Quebec parent's top fears for their children are: drug use (86%); depression (85%), lack of interest in school (84%); lack of confidence (82%); gang/crime involvement (82%); being bullied (81%); alcohol use (74%); anger management (71%); loneliness (71%) and internet/video game addiction (63%). If you usually bury your head in the sand and think this exaggerated, look to Quebec dropout rates, suicide rates, young adult welfare rates, drug and alcohol problems and we probably beat the national average on the wrong side of all those statistics, too.

Just look to last year's gun carried by an alleged drug dealer student at Westwood Senior, reported bullying incidents at other area schools, and wake up to the currently very high level of vandalism, youth crime, underage drinking and drug use in Hudson. Then, think back to the tragic death of a young teen girl in Hudson due to drugs. Lack of involvement and mentoring in a child's life can rob your children of their future or even their life.

Our two children were honours and scholarship students, both actively involved in their community, as well as in student leadership and peer mentoring. One died a hero in service of our community and the other is now a beautiful medical doctor healing the sick and raising our grandchildren with her husband (a Big Brother for years).

It's not luck; it's hard work, time, involvement and mentoring from parents. We didn't fear, because we knew. We maintained a clear awareness of and respect for the pitfalls that surrounded our children. We knew their friends and the parents of their friends. Both stepped gently off the perfect paths at times, but both quickly found far more value in achieving the lofty goals they had set for themselves. And both our kids still found lots of fun as a part of a circle of great friends who today also far outperform the average of their peers.

Parenting requires teamwork from both parents. Modern families are shorter on time and energy than ever. Many children are part of divorces that don't always best address the real needs of youth for guidance. Many are inconvenient accessories to a too full parental career or social life rather than the happy center of wonder and love that a family needs to be.

Parenting a child is a limited time event: you've got their worship for a few years, their uncompromised respect for a few more until you become inconvenient and irrelevant for a few more, and occasionally you must absolutely ruin their lives right to the edge of their hatred.

Underlying that, must be a love you never cause them to question, a safe place to return to without fear whenever they really need your best advice at a critical juncture.

The non-negotiables are absolute honesty and solid effort, but what you expect from your child is irrelevant. Teach them to expect a lot from themselves, so they can build a future that is of interest and value for them, not for you. Help them become what they most want to be, not what you've decided they should be. A child without any direction must be guided to their own passions, not one of your ideas.

You can't successfully impose what your child can't or won't see, instead help them find a clear vision for their future. Parenting is not about you, it is all about the children. Kids who respect themselves will respect you and the community around them. Every child seeks nothing more than unconditional love of a parent. When they can't find that at home, there's a never ending supply of acceptance among their peers, many who can show them what you fear most.

If parenting problems are just too much, enlist outside help. Find someone they might respect to help guide them or a professional counsellor. Organizations like Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Canada can help provide quality mentors to fill gaps you can't. Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada is our nation's largest youth mentoring program, providing quality mentoring for 27,000 Canadian children and teens with 19,500 adult volunteer mentors serving 1,000 communities.

Never give up on any child you see heading for trouble, because if we give up on them they give up on themselves. Giving up on any child's future should be our greatest fear as parents and as a community.

We all need to be the good examples and also to have something in common with our kids. Please re-read that list of what parents fear for their kids. Teens have exactly the same overwhelming fears for their parents: using drugs or alcohol, lacking confidence, being depressed, angry, addicted, lonely, or being bullies. Go talk with your kids and never stop loving and listening.