



**Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Ministry of Social Development and Family Services**

FEATURE ADDRESS

**Senator the Honourable Donna Cox
Minister of Social Development and Family Services**

LAUNCH OF 2023 PARENTING WORKSHOPS

Wednesday November 15, 2023

**Belmont Community Centre
Jerningham Avenue, Belmont**

10:00 am

I am pleased to address you today, as we launch the 2023 edition of the National Parenting Programme. Through this series of Workshops, it is our intention to bring into sharper focus the difficulties many parents encounter in raising their children. This series has its genesis in the Ministry's recognition of the critical role of the family in shaping an individual's development and well-being, and more so the increasing challenges encountered daily by adolescents and children.

The Ministry's National Family Services Division has found itself having to intervene in several areas where the first responder ought to have been the parents. Other Departments of this Ministry, other Ministries and Agencies have provided us with sufficient evidence to indicate that there is a parental crisis in our country at the moment, and as a responsible Ministry, we cannot and will not give up our responsibility to intervene and provide tangible solutions.

This Parenting Programme is therefore designed to provide participants with information, tips and coping strategies as well as empower parents to better support their children and by extension, their families.

We at this Ministry understand only too well that parenting is hard work. There are really no manuals that can totally guide you through, except your own personal experiences. And many persons who grew up swearing they would never act and speak to their children the way their parents did, find themselves using the same language and methods of discipline which they absolutely hated.

The simple truth is that while it may take little effort to father or mother a child, infinitely more is required to be a father or a mother to that child.

Similarly, the discomfort of pregnancy and pain of childbirth fades into insignificance when the results of a child raised without a proper value system begin to manifest.

Ladies and gentlemen, if we are to be honest with ourselves, we will admit that many parents have abdicated their responsibility to instill in their children the value system that will prevent them from going astray. There is no doubt that the days of the extended family are over. Some families do not have the benefit of children being left in the care of grandparents, because their grandparents are found amongst the actively employed and many are much younger.

In some cases, the leaders of the gangs become the surrogate fathers, and the tablets and phones the surrogate mothers.

I am often amazed at the reaction of many parents when, for legitimate reasons, the school system might have to be shut down for a day. The collective cry then is “so what am I to do with my children... who will take care of them.” In a situation where all of us are longing to belong to something or someone, it is not a difficult leap to see why so many of our young people are now falling prey to lives of destruction, occasioned by their surrogate parents; the gang leaders or the tablets and phones.

The Book of Proverbs 22:16 in the Holy Bible, admonishes us to “train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”

In short, ladies and gentlemen, we must raise our children so that they can go on to become productive contributors to our society.

You and I both know however, that there is still a lot of work to be done in this regard, and that is where the work of the government, family and the wider society intersects.

In this regard, the Ministry is in partnership with several state and non-state organizations, Non-Government Organizations, Community Based Organizations and Faith Based Organizations in an effort to address the multiple needs of the family with specific focus on the parenting function.

We understand that good parenting is a dynamic interplay between and amongst various branches in society. A 2016 study by the Wilder Foundation highlighted several benefits to be derived from parenting education programmes like the one we are launching.

Some of these benefits include an improvement in parental empowerment and competency; improvement in parental mental health and well-being, and decreased use of corporal punishment and child abuse. Therefore, it is clear that parenting programmes can have an impact on both the lives of parents and their children and by extension, the entire family circle.

Healthy parents lead to healthy families- not just physically, but emotionally and spiritually as well. However, at times parents do feel stressed, overworked, judged, and inadequate.

Burnout and exhaustion are real, but without a community around to validate those feelings, many parents may feel like they are alone. Hence,

programmes such as these are valuable opportunities for increasing resilience, developing new coping skills, and learning new ways of parenting.

Over the past four years, **1029** parents benefited from our parenting programmes, where we have addressed the needs of parenting generally and also with specific focus on parenting for men, co-parenting, grand-parenting and community parenting. Furthermore, a range of topics will be covered in the programme including: Violence and domestic violence; Parenting and technology; Health and education; Children's rights and responsibilities; Enhancing coping skills and building resilient families.

By increasing the number of parents exposed to these topics, we believe that there can be a qualitative impact on the lives of their children. We believe that through positive parenting, the scourge of juvenile delinquency, or even the many fights amongst school children, particularly girls, can be curbed.

Apart from these Parenting Workshops, the Ministry through our National Family Services Division will continue to provide additional support to families through counselling services, mediation services and psychosocial support, for issues ranging from behavioural problems in children and adolescents to crisis interventions.

Furthermore, the Suicide Prevention Hotline was established in November 2022 as another lifeline for persons, including parents, who feel overwhelmed and are experiencing difficulty coping with their roles as caregivers and providers, among others. Since its establishment, some 1,200 persons have accessed the Hotline. We believe that early detection is paramount, and if we can prevent one individual from ending his/her own life, we would have played a role in helping a family.

We have combined all these efforts with our Ministry's Values, Attitudes and Behaviours campaign which continues unabated, and which we will continue to roll out in this new fiscal year. Ladies and gentlemen, I urge you today to collectively aim to socialize our children in such a way, where their lives epitomize the values each and everyone one of us should possess and align to, whether it is Compassion, Respect, or Resilience.

As parents, let us treat our children with the love and respect they need and deserve. And most importantly, let us recognize that parents have an important role to play in shaping the future generation. In other words, as parents and guardians, let us ***Be the Change*** in order for us to ***See the Change*** in our future generation.

I close by congratulating the staff of the National Family Services Division, for always answering the call to serve and for their efforts to develop and sustain initiatives to help strengthen families. I also wish to thank all of our

exhibitioners for coming out and providing information to our guests about the role you play in supporting parents.

I do sincerely hope that the upcoming parenting sessions conducted by this Ministry would be impactful and will help to empower and transform the quality of life of many of our families.

I thank you. May God bless you.