

ARE KIDS MORE STRESSED IN 2013?

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

I have heard it said many times that today's kids live in a much different and more stressed world than in, say, the 1970s. There have been various reasons put forward for this line of thought, such as media watering down our family values (now anything goes), parent and school expectations being higher, fashion dictates, single parent families, lack of job opportunities for school leavers, a depressed economy, family breakdowns and loss of household income - just to name a few. Yet when I look back on my teenage years, I don't see a great difference in overall stress levels related to our evolving social climate.

The challenge to family values: I was brought up with strict family values and, therefore, the temptation to violate those values has never been an issue with me. They stand the test of time. If family values education is not a strong point within a family, the end result would still be the same, whether those teens lived in the 1970's or in 2013.

The pressure of fashion trends: When it comes to fashion trends, in the 1970s magazines, storefronts, movies and teen heroes influenced fashion. These days we are constantly being bombarded by media outlets. The ability to buy high-end fashion gear tends to be controlled by the current economy and the maximum limit on the credit card!

The stress of family break-up: We imagine the pressure within families today is much greater than in earlier days. (The most common reason for family dissension has always been arguments over money and parenting styles). Parents were not always able to just leave the home and support themselves back in the day, but by causing constant tension through arguing, it must have been just as stressful for children then as one parent leaving the home these days. Both may create the same level of stress within the family.

Stress related to the job market for school leavers: It was much easier in the 1970s for school leavers to walk into jobs. The variety of work was probably one tenth of what it is today, but the entry qualifications for jobs were often not high either. Now we have a tremendous variety of occupations, but the entry qualifications and experience are often far greater than the job actually warrants (because there is a huge supply of potential workers and very little demand for work). Today we are producing university-qualified graduates for a great variety of occupations that, in many instances have no job openings. The pay rate in the earlier days was not great, but the pay rate is nil these days if you can't get a job and you have huge student debt.

The situations that stressed kids out in the 70s are still the same today. Kids worry that they won't be liked, and they worry that if they don't go along with

what their friends are doing they will be ostracized. There has always been pressure on kids to be 'cool' by wearing the latest clothing. Interestingly enough, I have noticed a trend amongst some kids now wanting to do their own thing, to go 'retro' or whatever.

Biblical values have never changed, although the compunction to abide by them is constantly being challenged; the greatest influence coming through the media. Yet, with strong parent modeling, training and open communication we can guide our kids safely through the stresses of teen years.

I would like to end with some excellent advice from an article by Dr. Randy Cole (Terrific Parenting).

“Rather than being driven by fear and worry about events and (societal) changes out of our control, we can focus again on the facts. You do make a difference. The focus of your energies is best spent on mastering the fundamental parenting strategies that maximize your influence as a parent.”

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.