

3-HOUR WORKSHOP FOR PARENTS
(INCLUDES WATCHING 93 MINUTE FILM)

Introduce the film by saying that this film is based on true stories -- everything in it actually happened. Show the 3 sample interviews in the "Special Features" of the DVD before showing the film.

----- WATCH THE FILM "YOUTH VIOLENCE: INSIDE THE SKIN" -----

PART I:
REVIEW/DISCUSS THE PARENTS IN THE FILM, *YOUTH VIOLENCE: INSIDE THE SKIN*.

- Sean's mom
- Sean's dad
- James and Kisha's mom - Denise
 - Boyfriend - Jamal
 - Friend - Sadie
- Brad's parents
- Anne's mom
- Michael's parents

PART II:
YOUR ROLE IN YOUR CHILD'S EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Time -- not empty time, but quality time. How to give this if you have not already developed THE HABIT.

Let's say, for discussion sake, that there is ONLY ONE THING that will fix this problem that is going on with your child. That is for him/her to spend MORE QUALITY TIME with you.

Okay, if that's true, then let's see how you can get from here to there. We are assuming that even the best parents can use some improvement in this area. Time is the thing that we don't seem to have today -- it's the thing, regardless of our jobs, our debts, our responsibilities, that we need to get a grip on -- an area in which we all, the entire society, need to make changes.

Let's look at a formula.

CARING > MOTIVATION > DISCIPLINE > QUALITY TIME WITH YOUR CHILD.

The first two of these, caring and motivation, go hand in hand. Without caring, you won't have motivation. If you don't care, there is nothing anyone can do about it except for you. Actually, there is nothing anyone else can do about any of this except for you. Children who have caring parents, regardless of what they parents do or how they show it, may go through phases of rebellion, but in the long run, a stabilizing and grounding thing has been built in your child simply because the child knows you care -- and this will see the child through eventually and in times of extreme social pressure. This type of child is much less susceptible to the cycle of followers & leaders, which is the greatest pitfall for young people to deal with.

To develop caring:

Put yourself in your child's shoes. Imagine, deeply, that you are your own mom or dad and that this child is you. You have learned to be self-sufficient for your own survival -- and now you must learn to be sensitive and vulnerable so that you can feel what your child is feeling. Until you can feel what your child is feeling and see through your child's eyes, you will not be able to make the connection that could possibly save your child. If you feel that your child has stopped communicating with you, ask yourself when is the last time you confided in your child that you were afraid or confused? Showing your vulnerability to your child will invite your child to share his/her own fears. It's a 2 way street. Remember parents don't have to be perfect.

Kids are biologically wired to seek their group -- their family, their buddies. They're like puppies and are group animals. Later they are able to see themselves as separate and think for themselves. But until they are past puberty and actually begin to develop as independent, thinking adults (this is usually mid-to-late teens), it is almost impossible to teach them to think for themselves. Therefore, if you do not provide the strong, emotional link that they seek, they will look for it elsewhere.

For their own protection, we keep trying to teach them how to stand on their own feet -- but this will never work because of their biological development. We try to teach them how to analyze a situation or a person to be sure that the person has the child's best interest in mind and is not just using the child for gang dirty work or to support the power needs of a ego-centric personality -- such as a gang leader. We all know that kids are used by gangs -- and the kids think those in the gang really care. (This doesn't have to be a formal "gang" but a group of friends who hang together.) So we would like to teach the child to ask "does this person have my best interest in mind? Does he/she really care about what happens to me?" Most kids (and adults, for that matter) who are in need of personal support cannot see the person objectively enough to answer this question truthfully. All of our perceptions are colored by what we need and want in life. We heard incarcerated teens say repeatedly, "I was hanging with the wrong crowd." We tell our children everyday, "Don't get involved with those people. They're a bad influence." We must realize that they are at an age that seeing objectively, thinking independently, is virtually impossible for them to do because of their biological and emotional development. Parents or a positive adult figure must provide "the group" or the child will seek a supportive environment elsewhere. Don't blame the child for this; it is his/her nature as a human being. Parents must ask themselves some very hard questions if their kids get involved with "the wrong crowd".

"The wrong crowd" is more alluring than the "right crowd" if home and family connection isn't strongly established. "The right crowd" is less glamorous and, on the surface, appears to be less powerful. A child who doesn't have a strong home connection is deeply angry because he/she has not been given something vital. As Dr. Moyana said, "There are 2 basic human needs, love and shelter." If these are not given, the child is severely handicapped. This handicap causes the child to seek power, to utilize force, to make things right inside -- so he/she seeks a forceful alliance on the outside to try to correct this problem. The wrong crowd uses force to get what they want. This looks like true power to the child who feels powerless to make parents care. So he/she looks for the group that can give him/her a sense of control to require love, to punish parents (or someone else) because of the very deep anger the child has toward the injustices in his/her life.

So back to love as a basic human requirement. When it is not there in early childhood, the child develops a very deep sense that something is wrong, and the child feels that somehow this must be righted. This translates into an anger that never goes away UNLESS as an adult, the

child learns self-love and is able to see and forgive the parents inability to give the love that the child needed. This is true for your children and it's true for you. This psychological work is not possible until the child matures to the point of seeing him/herself as a separate entity, responsible for his/her actions. Until a person can step out of self and see him/herself, this individual identity cannot develop, and then one is able to "work on him/herself" because a measure of objectivity is possible, and enough self-discipline has generally developed by this time to give the "child" a method for self-improvement, for re-programming childhood traumas.

One might think this cannot take place without professional intervention, but intervention can do nothing until a person is motivated to change. And at that point, the person tends to find a way to change -- a therapist can help, but there is no lack of help (books, movies, positive friends). The key ingredient is motivation, and the source of this must be internal, not external.

Back to our formula:

CARING > MOTIVATION > DISCIPLINE > QUALITY TIME WITH YOUR CHILD.

So if a parent really wants to help his/her child, he/she must first develop caring for the child -- this begins with caring for oneself. Practice loving yourself. This may sound hokey and warm-fuzzy-like, but it has been clinically proven to be the bottom line, the only absolute requirement, for giving love to someone else. In all of us, there is much work to be done here. Think about that for a moment.

So first you must care, which will give you the motivation to do something. You may, at this point, need to develop the discipline to put that caring into action -- but remember, regardless of how you act out your caring, there is no substitute for real caring. You can't go through the motions. On a gut level, a child knows. You can't screw up parenting if you care deeply, because a child always knows that the big thing is there, regardless of the actions that you take. If you really care, you can't help but show it -- in small ways or larger ways, it is clearly there.

If this is a new thing for you, your child may not trust the change at first. At that point, you need to do things to show the child that you care -- and that can take discipline on your part because of time constraints.

If necessary, make appointments with yourself, record them on a calendar, do whatever it takes to set the time aside. Be regimented about the time block. And most importantly, focus your mind and heart when you are with the child. This is quality time, not just time. Time by itself won't give the child the basic human requirement of love. You must focus mind and heart on caring for the child, seeing to his/her needs. Asking questions and really listening -- not in a judgmental way, but in an accepting way. During these times of talking and being together, tell the child about your own fears, your own inner thoughts, your own childhood. Relationships are two-way. If you don't share yourself with your child, your child will not share him/herself with you.

So now we see how the whole formula works.

Let's add two things:

"parent" and an "emotionally stable child"

CARING PARENT > MOTIVATION > DISCIPLINE > QUALITY TIME WITH YOUR CHILD > EMOTIONALLY STABLE CHILD

**PART III:
GUIDED JOURNAL EXERCISE**

(Hand out papers/pencils.)

No one will see this but you. For each answer, don't write about how things should be or who is to blame for how things are -- just write how things actually are. This is a non-judgmental assessment. Make it a reporting of facts -- look at it from a distance and describe what you see. Step out of the emotional feeling of being in the picture -- perhaps it might be useful to you to pretend you are describing someone else.

- 1.) Describe your parents and their behavior toward you.
- 2.) Describe yourself as a child.
- 3.) Describe yourself as a parent.
- 4.) Describe your child.
- 5.) Describe your relationship with your child --- no judgments, no "lessons" of how things should be. Just describe how it actually is.
- 6.) Now -- you may step back into the picture and be the parent. Look at your child, look deeply into his/her eyes and write what you would like to tell him/her.

SUMMARIZE...

What have you learned? (*discussion*)

- Caring -- how to develop more of that feeling by looking at your own childhood and loving yourself. Then putting yourself in your child's place (inside the skin). Trying to imagine how your child feels, how he/she sees the world.
- Taking time for your child -- disciplining yourself, not letting yourself and your family be victims of the crazy time crunch imposed by society and finances of today. A little time given by a caring parent is worth more than lots of time given by a parent who doesn't care. Find a little time.
- Giving quality time -- really listen, really share who you are.

This leads us back to caring. Learn to care about yourself. Take a look at what not taking care of yourself in this way is doing to your child, and what this will do to your child's children -- this is obviously passed on -- and you have the power to stop this cycle for all of the generations within your own family or this will go on and on.