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Teach children to deal with grey areas

By Dr Vishalache Balakrishnan - October 9, 2017 @ 1:19pm

Children need extra attention from parents, teachers and researchers to develop a positive outlook on life. PIC BY ZUHAINY ZULKIFFLI

WITH all the social problems and suicides taking place, I keep asking myself: “What is wrong with our education system?”, “What is wrong with our family system?” and “What is wrong with ourselves?”

When there are social problems, we tend to put the blame on someone or something, and we seem to live our entire lives like that.

Instead of just focusing on being a progressive and developed country, can we focus on teaching students to cope with the grey areas in their lives, which are getting bigger by the day?

What do I mean by grey areas? When I was young, I was taught to be good because God liked good children.

Then as I grew older, I became more rational and asked my mother, who was a convent girl and a very strict disciplinarian: “Can God see all of us all the time?” Of course, she said “Yes”.

What is wrong with our education system? What is wrong with our family system? What is wrong with ourselves?
My next question was, why are there churches, mosques, temples, prisons and hospitals? My house was surrounded by such places. She said good people went to churches, mosques and temples. Bad people went to prison for committing crimes and people who were ill went to hospitals for treatment. She linked them to colours: good to white and bad to black.

Later, I became a little bolder, especially during mealtimes when mother used to force me to eat food which did not taste good to me. Her famous phrase was: “You know, children in Africa are starving and you are so lucky to have food on your plate.”

Well, being a curious child, I asked: “Okay, if I eat all my food, will all the children in Africa be full?”

You can imagine what happened after I asked that question. I consider this type of situation not black or white, but grey.

After five decades without my mother around (God bless her soul) to answer my questions, I became a seeker. My philosophy of teaching life skills has changed radically over the years and I have come up with a simple formula.

We inculcate values in children so that they live within the white area and stay away from the black area. But when they are caught in the grey area, they are expected to move towards the white area without any guidance. They need coping skills, strategies and practical values.

They need to sit with us, discuss their lives and be taught to make moral judgments in their daily lives.

They need extra attention from all of us — parents, teachers and researchers — to develop a positive outlook on life. They need to have the resilience to come back stronger despite all the problems they face in their daily lives.

Most importantly, they need to be given an opportunity to speak from their hearts.

And, my question is this: Are we listening?

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