

## Major Challenges Facing Families in an Independent Bahamas

As we celebrate the 52<sup>nd</sup> Independence of The Bahamas, we are grateful for what we have done so far. We have come a long way. Independence gave rise to the establishment of important institutions that are integral to the nation's health and prosperity. For example, the National Insurance Board and The Central Bank, to name a few. However, there is one institution that is much older than our nation that is causing great challenges and preventing our country from truly thriving. This institution is the central core unit of The Bahamas—the family.

Writer Tim LaHay reminds us of the importance of the family with these words. “The family is the most important single factor in the molding of a human being (the nation). It either prepares one to reach for his or her ultimate destiny and fulfillment, or it cripples and inhibits one from attaining his or her potential.” I hasten to say that the crippling of our nation has its genesis in weakening of the Bahamian family. This weakening did not just start a few years ago. It has its beginning rooted in the archaic philosophies, crippling traditionalism, and false religious beliefs passed down through many generations. Hence, today, the modern Bahamian family is facing serious challenges some of which we have inherited. These challenges are impacting the workforce, education system, and health and human services in our country.

With the limited space I have to write, I will briefly share a few of the challenges I believe are inhibiting the development of healthy families and our nation in an independent Bahamas.

1. **Parents of yesteryear did not parent so their children could parent others and those children can effectively parent others.** The modern Bahamas inherited this problem. The parenting style of yesteryear did not foster the transition of learning. Most parents were authoritarian. They ruled with power and might and not wisdom and love. Hence, their method of parenting did not provide information for wrongdoing, nor respect for the child’s opinions and feelings. Hence, the child would not have any knowledge of what he or she can intelligently transmit to his or her children about a certain wrongdoing. Consequently, today’s parents are following the same authoritarian parenting methods and reaping poor results. The poor parenting skills have led to indolent, troubled youth and dysfunctional family units. Poor methods of discipline, reinforced by spiritual beliefs, are driving our children up a wall of anger and indifference. Too many of our children are being painfully and seriously beaten, leading to serious feelings of anger and revenge.

2. **The lack of functional literacy.** Far too many of our adults and youth cannot read or write intelligently. This impacts cognitive processing and effective decision making, and employment. In the 2023 article titled “How Low Literacy Affects the Ability to Perform Daily Tasks” the writer states: “The absence of functional literacy, which is the ability to use reading, writing, and numeracy skills to function effectively in daily life, leads to significant challenges in various aspects of life, including employment, income, and overall well-being. Individuals with low functional literacy often experience higher rates of unemployment and earn significantly less than their literate counterparts. This can perpetuate a cycle of poverty, hindering access to opportunities for personal and societal advancement.” Readers, are you getting the picture?

3. **Lack of intrapersonal intelligence.** In my 2019 article entitled “Managing Conflict,” I wrote: “What determines how one manages perceived or actual conflicts is first how one feels about him or herself. In other words, predictors of healthy conflict management and even crime prevention are two profoundly important aspects of emotional intelligence. First, the proper development of interpersonal intelligence—the understanding and management of yourself effectively. Second, the proper development of Interpersonal intelligence--understanding and relating effectively with people. One author elaborates on intrapersonal intelligence with the following statement: “Intrapersonal intelligence is the ability to acknowledge, value, and manage your feelings so that they are expressed appropriately and effectively, laying the groundwork for meaningful relationships and productive teamwork. It is also the ability to recognize and diagnose the emotion of others and the ability to respond appropriately to emotional cues.” A percentage of the Bahamian population lacks these important skills, and it is evident in the tourism industry when workers interact with visitors, the general labor force, the classrooms, and boardrooms.

4. **Divorce adjustment issues.** While I know that divorce is necessary in many instances, there is often unnecessary pain and misery created by the spouses themselves or by the laborious procedures of divorce. Painfully too often, children

are caught in the middle of the anger and resentment of their divorcing parents. This pain and anger linger throughout the life of the child (if not treated with counseling). Thus, it impacts decision-making, lifestyle, and proper self-government.

5. **A sense of entitlement that has ruined self-discipline and personal accountability.** In the article “What Is an Entitlement Mentality?” by WebMD, it states, “A sense of entitlement is the belief that one is inherently deserving of certain privileges, recognition, or treatment, often without having earned it. It's the feeling that one is owed something simply by virtue of who they are, rather than based on effort, contribution, or merit.” This kind of thinking and behavior is crippling our nation, and sadly, it starts and is nourished in the home. Children learn from their parents' behavior; thus, the sense of entitlement is transmitted from parent to child.

6. **Unsupervised exposure to digital media (*social media, TV, smartphones, game devices, etc*).** The smartphone and social media have now become the quasi-parent for many children. Lazy parents are comfortable allowing their children to sit for hours on their iPads or phones to do whatever they want to do. These children are exposed to subject matters their brains are not ready to handle. These devices have become the go-to for babysitting. The problem is the parents are not aware of the cyber world the child is diving into thus often creating conflict, sleepless nights, poor appetite, poor anger management, poor academic achievement, etc. One negative by-product of social media is poor sleeping habits of our youth. This is the most sleep-deprived generation since the beginning of humankind.

7. **Lack of proper marriage preparation.** Too many of our young people are rushing into marriage and not getting proper marriage preparation. Research tells us that pre-marriage education reduces divorce by fifty percent.

8. **Addictions—alcohol and marijuana.** Alcohol and drug addiction are leading too many of our youth to a life and anger and pain. This is also draining the resources of our nation's health and social services.

9. **The increase in suicide.** Note that the lack of the ability of family and friends to understand and intelligently respond to the pain of others is one factor impacting the increase of suicide. *Lack of empathy.*

10. **Spiritual beliefs that devalue women, reinforce a hierarchical structure in relationships, and strengthen the practice of male dominance.**

I am unable to expand on all of these points. I thought to just stimulate your thinking to recognize a few of the stumbling blocks to national success. Hence, what is the solution? Here are three brief suggestions: 1) Systematic, intentional education. 2) The death of the old guard. 3. The birth of new approaches and ideas.

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