

Think of your future

Health minister is worried about the state of affairs among Malaysian youths and wants young people to take charge of their own well being.

More and more young Malaysians are becoming obese. There is an increase in youths suffering from depression. Social, synthetic drug usage amongst the young is at an alarming rate. And while the spread of HIV from drug abuse is down, AIDS contracted from indiscriminate, unprotected sex among heterosexuals is on the rise. And a lot more young people between 21 and 25 are smoking.

It's an understatement to say that Health Minister Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai is deeply concerned with the state of affairs involving our youths.

Knowing fully well how important this segment of society is to the future of the country, it is the minister's intention - indeed it is one of his main goals - to see as many young Malaysians grow up into productive adults, having adopted a good, healthy lifestyle.

But the challenge seems insurmountable, what with almost the whole world's youth population, going through the same predicaments.

"The young today have so much more to cope with; a lot more to deal with than the past generations. And this is where the problem lies. Many are not able to withstand the stress which comes from the ultra competitive world we live in now," Liow, who has a daughter and two sons, discloses.

Liow reveals, because of this, some become suicidal (although he says the numbers are not so high in Malaysia as in many other countries), some turn to drugs, and there are those who just give up on life. Then there are the others who would find solace in their packs of cigarettes.

"Twenty one percent of the population smokes. That's shocking."

There also seems to be a growing number of youths who are suffering from heart diseases and have breathing-difficulties because of this, he says.

Liow is equally worried that 60 per cent of Malaysians are either obese or overweight. "Can you believe that only 14 per cent only of our young are participating in sports?"

So, what's the minister's advise to young



Malaysians?

"Always remember that whatever you do or don't do today will come back to revisit or haunt you in later years.

Remember that you are not just living for today. That's why you need to take good care of yourself today, for tomorrow."

On the Health Ministry's part, they have ongoing campaigns to help youths cope with whatever pressures they are facing; "We have launched our mental health campaign where we teach young people how to deal with stress; campaigns discouraging young people from smoking - we've used rather scary pictorials of what could happen to a smoker; projects that involve going into universities and colleges to warn students about unhealthy diets and so on.

"I had my own share of problems when I was growing up too. But not the kind we have today because I come from a very poor family. We lived in a rural area. At 18, I was still tapping rubber. My issue was with my confidence level but I slowly built that up. I worked harder; I preoccupied myself with work.

"I think this formula still works. Immerse yourself in work. Don't allow anything or anyone to get you down."

And be a good friend. Should your friend have problems, lend an ear and be concerned. If you think the problem is too big for you to handle, we have many Non-Governmental Organisations that are ready to help, like the Befrienders.

Datuk Seri Liow Tiong Lai

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