



Stop blaming the Police

Christopher Locke says society must stop blaming the police for the breakdown in values, the increase in anti-social behaviour and the growing problems with violent crime and hears David Cameron's plans to repair our broken society



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Having worked as a police officer originally and then as a police commentator for over 25 years I see clearly the changes that have led to the problems we are facing today in terms of youth crime and anti-social and violent behaviour.

In the Sixties and Seventies there were many things wrong with policing but what many fail to recognise is that there were also many things right about it. This is also true about teaching and most importantly parenting.

Then over the last 25 years successive governments have tried to address the growing problems by focussing on policing, by trying to legislate there way out of the problem and by modernising education. Unfortunately they have missed the root cause of the problem, which is bad or misguided parenting.

Subsequently as the children of those generations become parents themselves the problems escalate and will continue to do so until the government rethinks they way they try to tackle these issues.

Part of the blame must be placed firmly at the feet of the explosion of 'political correctness' which had gagged good policing, good teaching and to some extent good parenting.

Now like the runaway truck it is hard to stop and few politicians have the courage to

stand up against 'political correctness' for fear of being unfairly labelled a person who wishes to restrict peoples human rights or worse a racist, sexist or homophobic which is the kiss of death for any politician.

Political correctness has stripped all authority away from police officers and teachers. Also it has left parents believing they should respect their childrens 'human right' to have freedom of expression, even if that means scrawling graffiti over walls or roaming the streets in gangs until late, watching unsuitable and perhaps violent films,

answering back and swearing at police officers and teachers and many other things that would not have been tolerated years ago.

Years ago an errant youth would not worry as much about facing a police officer or teacher when they had done wrong as the biggest repercussion would come from their parents. This has massively declined and many parents today instead of reprimanding their child will try to blame police officers and teachers often making complaints and citing human rights, religion or ethnicity.

The "shouldn't you be out catching real criminals" retort is more likely these days rather parents reprimanding their child for scribbling on a wall or taunting an old lady. Police officers and teachers often face false allegations from youths for the most minor things yet and the whole weight of the system is placed on the officer or teacher to prove he or she is innocent.

As a person who for many years has worked part time as a psychotherapist with various charities helping people with drug and alcohol addictions, violent behaviour, domestic violence, child abuse and many other issues I have seen how a lack of guidance and discipline (boundaries) have lead them into the problems they have.

The most important influence on the formation of a child is clearly the parents. If the parents fail to set clear boundaries a child is likely to grow up lacking clarity as

to what is right and wrong.

The second most influential groups are police officers and teachers both who play a part in setting boundaries but over zealous political correctness has undermined both these groups and we are now seeing the consequences.

So as far as I can see the solution is clear. Why not look at those children who grow up to be decent people and see how their parents brought them up to understand the difference between right and wrong and how to respect other people? Why not look more at how firm but fair policing works and learn from that? Why not learn from and support good teaching practice rather than just policing bad teaching?

Good parenting is all about setting boundaries in relation to right and wrong as is good policing and good teaching the same.

Above all we must try to stop legislating our way out of all these problems because it is the hardest and most expensive way of trying to tackle anti-social behaviour and violent crime and a method that is often not effective.

Prison used to be the 'last resort' boundary but we messed with that to the extent now that even people who have committed quite serious offences know it is unlikely they will be sentenced to prison and if they are is likely to be a very short sentence.

Pop stars are seen to go to court again and again for drug offences and judges keep giving them second chances which sends out a clear message to youths that it is OK to buy and use illegal drugs.

Finally, with the public uproar about knife crime and antisocial behaviour, there does seem to be some signs that politicians from both parties are for the first time starting to take this seriously.

Recently the leader of the Conservative Party David Cameron talking about knife crime said: " If anyone thinks that criminal justice measures alone will halt the violence on our streets, then they do not understand the scale and the nature of the

“That is why we have to be utterly uncompromising on the key social reforms that will together help us repair our broken society.

“On school reform, we think the current school system must be replaced with a new system that breaks the stranglehold of the educational establishment and gives parents what they want and what their children deserve: innovation, choice and competition that delivers high standards for everyone, everywhere. We will simply not tolerate objections to our plans from the people and organisations who are responsible for the continuing failure of too much of state education in this country.

“On welfare reform, we think we need to end the idea that the state gives you money for nothing. If you can work, you must work. We will insist on it, and believe me, we will stick to our guns when the going gets tough.

“And when it comes to perhaps the most important area of all, families we will take action not just to support marriage and family stability, but on business too, to make Britain more family-friendly. “This is a bold, reforming policy agenda. But there is more to repairing our broken society than policy and politics. “I think the time has come for me to speak out about something that has been troubling me for a long time. I have not found the words to say it sensitively. And then I realised, that is the whole point.

“We as a society have been far too sensitive. In order to avoid injury to people's feelings, in order to avoid appearing judgemental, we have failed to say what needs to be said. We have seen a decades-long erosion of responsibility, of social virtue, of self-discipline, respect for others, deferring gratification instead of instant gratification.

“Instead we prefer moral neutrality, a refusal to make judgments about what is good and bad behaviour, right and wrong behaviour. Bad. Good. Right. Wrong. These are words that our political system and our public sector scarcely dare use any more.

“Of course as soon as a politician says this there is a clamour - "but what about all of you?" And let me say now, yes, we are human, flawed and frequently screw up. “Our relationships crack up, our marriages break down, we fail as parents and as citizens just like everyone else. But if the result of this is a stultifying silence about things that really matter, we re-double the failure. Refusing to use these words - right and wrong - means a denial of personal responsibility and the concept of a moral choice.

“We talk about people being “at risk of obesity” instead of talking about people who eat too much and take too little exercise. We talk about people being at risk of poverty, or social exclusion: it's as if these things - obesity, alcohol abuse, drug addiction - are purely external events like a plague or bad weather.

“Of course, circumstances - where you are



born, your neighbourhood, your school, and the choices your parents make - have a huge impact. But social problems are often the consequence of the choices that people make.

“There is a danger of becoming quite literally a de-moralised society, where nobody will tell the truth anymore about what is good and bad, right and wrong. That is why children are growing up without boundaries, thinking they can do as they please, and why no adult will intervene to stop them - including, often, their parents. If we are going to get any where near solving some of these problems, that has to stop.

“And why would a different government be any different? Not least because we understand that the causes of our broken society lie not just in government policies but in our national culture.

“Changing our culture is not easy or quick. You cannot pull a lever. You cannot do it top-down. But you can give a lead. You can give a nudge. You can make a difference if you are clear where you stand.

“Imagine if there was a Government that understood, really understood, that encouraging personal and social responsibility must be the cornerstone of everything that it did and that every move it took re-inforced that view.

“Saying to parents, your responsibility and your commitment matters, so we will give a tax break for marriage and end the couple penalty. Saying to head teachers you are responsible and if you want enforceable home school contracts and the freedom to exclude you can have it and we will judge you on your results.

“Saying to police officers you are responsible and the targets and bureaucracy are going but you must account to an elected individual who will want answers if you fail. Saying to business, if you take responsibility you can help change culture and we will help you with deregulation and tax cuts ... but in the long run they depend on the steps you take to help tackle the costs of social failure that have driven your costs up and up.

“It is the responsibility agenda and it will be the defining thread of any government I lead.

“Above all, I believe that this cultural change needs to start at home. The values we need to repair our broken society and to build a strong society are values that should be taught in the home, in the family. “That is why I have put the family right at the heart of my programme. Action on knife crime. Better policing and criminal justice reform. Reforming schools. Reforming welfare. These are all vital components of the social reform we need so urgently.

“But in the end, the state cannot do it all. In the end, the best regulation is self-regulation, not state regulation. That's why the family comes first. That's where we can really turn things around and start to repair our broken society.

“My focus on social reform does not mean for one second that I don't believe the next Conservative government won't have urgent work to do - to rebuild our economy or improve our NHS. But the nature of the changes will be different in those areas.

“It is in social policy that we mean to be most bold and radical, and for that I need a mandate. I need to make clear today the scale of our ambition so that everyone knows what they will be voting for at the next election.

“I want a mandate for restoring responsibility to our society. A mandate to call time on the twisted values that have eaten away at our social fabric. A mandate for tough action to repair our broken society.”

In response to the Governments plans to tackle knife crime David Cameron recently launched the Conservative's action plan (see panel).

He said “It includes policies to prevent knife crime. Policies to crack down on knife crime and criminals. And policies to deal with young offenders once they've been convicted. Above all, we have to send a clear message that carrying a knife on our streets is completely inexcusable and unacceptable in a civilised society.