

EQUAL AND SHARED PARENTING

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We live in interesting times. These are the days of two incomes and increasing rates of divorce. These are the days of large beautiful houses yet increasing numbers of broken homes. These are the days when many families are crumbling and children are being raised by one parent.

According to this Assemblies Strategic plan our vision is to have strong individuals, **families** and communities sharing the benefits and responsibilities of a unified, environmentally sustainable and prosperous NWT. Within that vision we share the goal of working with **families**, communities and **schools to improve the physical and mental well-being of our youth.**

With the increasing rates of divorce resulting in a larger number of single parent homes, children are the real victims. Within our legal and social service systems we should be promoting equal and shared parenting unless one or both parents are clearly shown to be unfit.

We should be promoting involvement of both mothers and fathers in all of the programs we provide to divorced parents, as it is good for the children. Studies show that children benefit from a positive connection to both parents. They are less likely to live in poverty and more likely to do better in school. They are more likely to have supportive relationships with both parents and extended family

members and they are less likely to have a stressed out single parent (often the mother who in our current system is often the primary care giver).

In cases of divorce we should be promoting positive involvement of fathers with their children because it is good for mothers. In our changing society, more mothers with young children work outside the home. More families live far away from close relatives, and many people now live among strangers in communities away from home and support that once existed.

Children who have a loving relationship with both parents, fathers and mothers, in situations of divorce have more confidence and are happier than children without equal contact of both parents. When parents can learn to put their personal conflict aside and have a more “business-like” approach, the children learn about conflict resolution, problem solving and respect.

When it comes to children we must always remember that a dad is a boy’s first hero and the first man that a girl loves and a mother is a girls first role model and the first woman that a boy loves and respects.

In order to meet our mandate to **improve the physical and mental well-being of our youth** this government must ensure that all of our programs and services, primarily in the areas of justice and social services, are focused on united families both where parents are happily married and divorced. For the sake of the children this government must stop paying lip service to, but must demonstrate

that we are committed to equal and shared parenting unless one or both parents are clearly shown to be unfit.

Mr. Speaker, at the appropriate time I will be asking the Premier some questions on this topic.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.