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OPINION

Personal Responsibility: A Life's Lesson We've Forgot

By Carrie Capuco

Thousands of Maryland high school students went back to school this month for another year of math, history and science classes. Yet, it appears that adults are the ones that may need a lesson or two in Personal Responsibility 101.

In a recent survey commissioned by Maryland Citizens Against Lawsuit Abuse, nearly 95 percent of Maryland teenagers, between the ages of 16 and 18, believe people should take responsibility for their actions instead of filing a lawsuit and blaming others. But, personal responsibility seems to be forgotten by the rest of us.

Today, more and more people are filing lawsuits instead of accepting the consequences of their decisions. Take, for example, the lawsuits filed against fast food restaurants by customers who claimed the food made them fat. Or the compulsive gambler who sued a casino for letting him squander away his life savings.

Such frivolous lawsuits have helped to erode our civil justice system and the idea of personal responsibility. All you have to do is turn on the television or read a newspaper to find certain personal injury lawyers encouraging people to sue anyone over anything. Instead of accepting personal responsibility for their actions, more people are looking to others to blame and sue. And too often, the loss of personal responsibility results in the abuse of our legal system.

Questionable lawsuits impact all of us. Countless playgrounds, small businesses and even our access to health care are threatened by lawsuit abuse. Frivolous lawsuits can shut down a small business or force doctors to close their practices. In fact, Maryland currently faces a severe medical malpractice crisis because some doctors can no longer afford to practice in the state's highly-litigious environment.

Frivolous lawsuits are so pervasive in our society that even teenagers are afraid of being sued. According to the survey, 81 percent of Maryland teenagers said they would be concerned that they or their family would be sued if they caused an accident or were involved in a disagreement with somebody.

So what can be done to curb frivolous lawsuits and the fear of being sued?

First, we must bring back the concept of personal responsibility. We need to lead by example and stress the importance of accepting responsibility for the actions we take. We must accept the consequences of our decisions—even if we do not like the outcomes—instead of finding others to blame. Our teenagers understand the importance of personal responsibility, so why don't we?

Second, we need to declare zero tolerance on lawsuit abuse. Our children should grow up in a society where personal responsibility is valued and our courts are used for justice, not greed. People should not resort to lawsuits simply because they did not want to accept the consequences of their own actions. We must stop playing the "blame game."

This school year, let's get an "A" in Personal Responsibility 101 and put an end to pointing fingers and blaming others. We need to restore fairness and balance to our civil justice system by bringing back personal responsibility.

Carrie Capuco is the executive director of Maryland Citizens Against Lawsuit Abuse (MDCALA). MDCALA is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, grassroots, public education organization dedicated to watching over the legal system and those who would seek to abuse it for undeserved gain.