

THE COUNSELOR

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YOUTH IN CRISIS:

Drinking, Drugs, and Sex

A sixteen year-old boy crashes his car into another car carrying a family. The head-on collision kills two teens from his car, and the father and two children in the other car, leaving two others in critical condition. This accident could have been prevented. The boy was legally drunk and had been smoking marijuana. In another part of our city the same night, a fourteen year-old girl goes to a party with her first boyfriend, she drinks a soda laced with rohypnol and gets date raped. A fifteen year-old boy smoking marijuana and drinking alcohol, gets into an argument with another boy at the skating rink, and stabs him to death. Elsewhere in Houston, an eighteen year-old boy slightly intoxicated on alcohol, tries cocaine for the first time and overdoses - dead! The same night a seventeen year-old high school girl gets pregnant by her boyfriend. Her girlfriend knows another teen who just had an abortion, and both of them have a friend recently diagnosed with genital herpes. Do all these scenarios sound absurd? These tragedies occur every day in our country and are increasing at an alarming rate.



The Facts:

- Alcohol use contributes to youth suicides, homicides, and fatal injuries - the leading causes of death of youth after auto crashes. Drinking is a factor in nearly half of all teen automobile crashes.
- Alcohol abuse is linked to as many as two thirds of all sexual assaults and date rapes of teens and college students.
- Alcohol is a major factor in unprotected sex among youth, increasing their risk of contracting HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases.
- Risk taking and judgment are adversely affected by marijuana; its use can lead to reckless driving and car accidents just as alcohol can.

- 71.2% of seniors surveyed in 1996 had used marijuana, cocaine, crack, hallucinogens, or steroids in their lifetimes.
- Approximately three million cases of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) occur among teenagers each year. HIV infection is the sixth leading cause of death among persons aged 15-24 in the U.S. According to experts, every hour in the U.S. another person under 21 is infected with HIV. Newsweek (1991) reports that every day 8,219 teenagers are infected with an STD. (2)
- Approximately 1 million teenage girls become pregnant every year.
- Each year 1.25 million children are born out of wedlock.
- 1.4 million babies are aborted each year in the United States.
- Child abuse is growing steadily. Child sexual abuse is growing fastest of all.

Alcohol:

Eleven million youth under age 21 drink alcohol. Nearly one half of them are binge drinkers, who drink five or more drinks in a row, one or more times in a two week period (AMA 1995-99). Alcohol, the most frequently used drug by high school seniors, is increasing along with the use of tobacco and marijuana. First time use of alcohol typically begins around age 13. Eighty-two

percent of high school seniors have used alcohol (NIDA, 1997). Each year, junior and senior high school students drink an estimated 35% of all wine coolers and about 1.1 billion cans of beer (AMA 1991). High school students lack essential knowledge about alcohol and its effects. More than 2.6 million teenagers in the U.S. do not know a person can die from an overdose of alcohol (AMA 1991). Young people who began drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to become alcoholics and twice as likely to have other abuse problems than those who began drinking at age 21.

Drugs:

The Center for Disease Control (1995) surveyed High School students (9-12th grade) and found 34.8% currently smoking cigarettes, 25.3% using marijuana, 3.1% using cocaine, 4.5% had used crack or freebased, 3.7% had used illegal steroids, 2.0% injected illegal drugs (LSD, PCP, Ecstasy, mushrooms, speed, ice, heroin) during their lifetime. Substance use trends among Texas youths are consistent with national trends, showing an increase in illicit drug use, especially marijuana, since 1992. Arrests for drug sales and possession for youths under 17 is increasing. Alcohol is the most widely used drug among Texas youths. A Texas School Survey (1996) found more instances of reckless behavior and lower grades as a result of substance abuse. First time use of marijuana usually begins around age 14. Texas seniors admitted to using the following drugs in their lifetime: 10.2% used cocaine compared to a national average of 7.1%, 2.3% used steroids illegally (1.9% national average) and 84.6% used alcohol (79.2% national average). Younger teens experience enormous pressure to do drugs too.

Sex

Twelve million teenagers are sexually active in the United States today. Fifty-six per-

cent of the girls and seventy-three percent of the boys have sexual intercourse by age 18. Fifty-three percent of high school students had sexual intercourse during their lifetime. The risk of pregnancy, abortion and parenthood are great for sexually active adolescents. Most teenage girls who become pregnant unexpectedly, postpone finishing their education, leaving them unable to adequately support themselves and their children. Child abuse is another problem among teenage parents. They lack adequate parenting skills and are stressed by poverty, low paying jobs, and unemployment. Many girls after abortions report severely diminished self-image, "suicidal behavior," insomnia, nightmares, fear of touching babies, constant thoughts about the aborted child, unforgiveness of self, bitterness, loneliness, and promiscuity. Most of these girls experience some form of Post Abortion Syndrome, a delayed reaction, which includes denial, hostility, depression guilt, and feeling victimized (Rue, 1986). Serious physical, emotional, and spiritual consequences occur when adolescents have sex. The number of cases of AIDS among teens doubles every 14 months (Time, 1991). The high probability of emotional scars, guilt, confusion about self and others, makes sexual activity a high risk proposition for both boys and girls (Search Institute Source, 1998).

Warning Signs

There are many indications that a teen may be drinking alcohol, doing drugs or having sex. Look for drastic changes or unusual behavior. Watch for attitudes of defiance, sustained power struggles, anger, sullenness, withdrawal, inordinate time on the phone, seclusiveness, mysterious and secretive behaviors, constant lying, and slipping out at night. Look for hangovers, drunkenness, giddiness, and other physical signs of intoxication. Carelessness, poor hygiene, and volatile tempers also warrant attention. Poor choices, intense preoccupation with friends, and a sudden drop in grades and motivation in school may suggest substance abuse. Serious "red flags" include dropping out of school activities, skipping classes, increasing denial, disobedience, and withdrawal. Teenagers who spend massive amounts of unaccounted for time alone with the opposite sex may be sexually active.

What Can We Do?

We are not helpless against the wave of destruction our nation's teenagers face. You can help, whether you are a parent, educator, youth director, pastor, or friend. Teenagers need straight talk, and firm, loving, limits. Win them over with love and compassion. They desperately need our love and guidance. Tell them about the disastrous consequences of drinking, taking

Hope for the Future

We face trials and temptations every day of our lives. We also have a purpose, a place, and work to do here on earth. We must rely on God to help us steer our children in the right direction so that as teenagers they have the foundation to resist the world's pull to engage in sex, drinking, and drugs. Our children are our future. They represent future generations, a legacy of hope. They pass onto their children what they receive from us. With God's love and help, they will be blessings rather than stumbling blocks. The family is the best setting for nurturing character, morality, responsibility, and wisdom in children. It takes a whole family to raise healthy teenagers, and a whole community to raise a family. There is hope and not despair, but we must do our part and allow God to do His part with us and our children. He promises to give us hope. "For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jeremiah 29:11).

drugs, and engaging in sex. Parents suspecting problems in any of these areas need to deal with their teenagers. Seek professional help if your teenager persistently engages in these behaviors. Consider a drug rehabilitation program to detox the teen from his addiction. The tough love approach may be necessary for some teens, especially when they completely disrupt the family or you find yourself constantly rescuing them. Join support groups with other parents facing the same situation. Parents should evaluate themselves carefully to see where they need to change in order to help their children. Stay close to God, your church friends and clergy during turbulent times with your teen. Pray daily for God's healing and protection for your teenagers.

Prevention

Do everything possible to prevent your kids from slipping into darkness. Take a stand from the beginning against the "value neutral" position. Raise children to put God first. We are no match against the inevitable temptation, sin and evil in this world. It is reassuring to know, however, that with God we can overcome these adversaries. The professional literature clearly shows that the strength of the family unit is intertwined with the practice of religion. The source of strong individuals, healthy families, and stable communities is found in marriage and in religious worship. Regular religious practice has powerful mental health benefits including lower rates of depression, more self-esteem, and greater family and marital happiness.

Engage children from the beginning in healthy activities like church and sports. Monitor their friends and activities, let go gradually, not abruptly. Watch for kids whose backgrounds make them vulnerable to drinking, drugs, and sex. Make family time a priority early on. Engage in those activities and functions which strengthen family ties (vacations, trips, retreats, and

outings). Adequate time with parents is critical for developing self-esteem and confidence for every child. Build strong loving relationships with your children. Connect with them. Educate them on the dangers of drinking, drugs, and sex. We can no longer afford to just "Let it be" or encourage our children to "do their own thing." The 1960's "value neutral" philosophy did not work.

F.Y.I.

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SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

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**2/13/00 - The Valley & the Door of Hope
Second Baptist Church**

**2/15/00 - Youth Pastors' Forum
St. John the Divine Episcopal**

**3/4/00 - TX Assoc. of Community
Colleges State Convention -
Speaking On: School Violence**

**4/2/00 - Loving Discipline
Second Baptist Church**