

KIDS WITH THESE QUALITIES ARE MUCH LESS LIKELY TO GET THEMSELVES IN TROUBLE

by Jeffrey Leiken, MA

The 2006 UNICEF Report found the United States ranked 20th out of 21 for the lives and well-being of children and adolescents in the economically advanced nations. (The Netherlands was #1, The UK was the only country doing worse).

One of every parent's worst nightmares is to find their son or daughter falling into one of the statistical categories of troubled teens... Whether it is underachieving in school, getting in trouble with authorities, heavily using substances, winding up depressed and on medication, or any of the myriad of other real parental concerns, there are factors that contribute greatly to teens winding up there, and factors that contribute greatly to ensuring they don't.

Having the qualities and skills listed below are vital for ensuring they don't!

- **Sense of direction and know what they want based on their own internal criteria** – This does not necessarily mean that they “know what they want to be when they grow up” but rather that they have either a general sense of direction typically in regards to interests they want to pursue (even if just continually in the short term), or they have goals for themselves that are personally challenging and ambitious (to make varsity, to get the lead in the play). Beneath this is having a well founded sense of their own personal ‘right and wrong’ as in what is ‘right’ for them and what isn't. **The measure for them comes in their ability to recognize who and what allows them to be themselves truly and who and what does not, then only choosing to do and associate with those that do.** This requires being able to do this based on an internal sense, not depending on outsiders to do it for them or using the criteria others have imposed on them. (It should be no surprise that a person who bases most decisions on outsiders opinions is a prime candidate for a troubled life –a key aspect of insecurity).

- **Ability to stay composed under pressure** – One inevitable fact of life is that things always come

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up and sometimes they do not feel particularly good. Whether it is a dealing with a big disappointment, facing the pressure of things like a major exam, a huge playoff game, auditions for a show, wanting to go talk to that attractive person or to pursue something no one says you can do; the ability to handle this pressure and perform at your best is vital. Those who can, are filled with much more hope and a greater sense of what they can do. Needless to say those kids who are constantly starting things but not finishing them or quitting every time it gets tough tend to lack this resiliency and these are the ones who often wind up discouraged and vulnerable to making bad choices as teens. (*New discoveries about the human brain have opened new doors of possibilities to retrain a person to have this quality and is amongst the most exciting discoveries out there. Listen to the audio CD “The Edge” to learn more).

- **Strong positive connection with healthy adults (family, mentors, coaches)** – Children and teens NEED adults who are present and available and who create a deep, secure sense of connection with them. Again and again research has shown that the single greatest factor in at-risk youth making it to success, is the presence of at least a one positive adult in their life committed to being there for them as they traverse the journey. Kids who have many of these adults in their life, consistently do better overall in life. Teens who have a positive healthy relationship with their father are even better off. A recent research in fact showed that one of the greatest contributing factors to teen girls making healthy choices about sex (how long they waited, how healthy they are about it) was the quality of their relationship with their father (the other was that sex was talked about in an open and healthy way in their homes – conversations many parent sadly avoid because it feels too awkward.) There is statistical proof to support that families who regularly spend time together in a positive engaged way produce happier, healthier kids.

- **Communication skills that empower social competency and social success** – The ability to effectively communicate and generate desired results is essential for living an empowered life. The more flexibility kids develop in terms of how to handle situations, relate to different people in different contexts and negotiate their way through life circumstances, the more confident they will be, the greater the sense of possibilities they will have for their lives and the more likely they are to make healthy, positive choices. Likewise the more limited they are with communication skills, the more likely they are to have troubles (* Teen girls who endlessly succumb to gossip and ‘mean girl’ culture have as one of their two greatest detriments, a massive limitation on their ability to communicate – see attached article on this). The most recent research on development is discovering that the greatest factor contributing to the phenomena known as “The Terrible Two’s” – the stage of life where two year olds are often demanding, moody and argumentative is that what drives this is their massive increase in awareness of life coupled with a severe limitation on their ability to communicate what they want. Take this same phenomena and apply it to the teen years and it makes sense, doesn’t it?

- **Resiliency** I saw this card waiting in line at the grocery store that read “Get knocked down 7 times, get up 8!” Those who do, win. Those who don’t never find out what they are capable of. Resiliency also entails having the capacity to know which battles are worth fighting and which are not, and the willingness to walk away from those that aren’t in spite of the pressure not to.

Unfortunately in our instant gratification culture it has become all too easy to give up and stay comfortable. More on that later.

- **Orientation towards possibilities** – In any given moment of life we are either oriented towards what is possible or what is not, what is working or what is not. This is not the 'half full' or 'half empty' approach, it is one that starts from the premise that the cup is always full. Those who have it are able to easily move on from setbacks since they don't dwell on them. They remain resourceful at all times since they are always thinking about what is available and what they can do and they avoid people and circumstances where negativity prevails. Kids who have this also tend to have clearer boundaries regarding how far in the 'bad' direction they are willing to go, typically enough to satisfy curiosity but not enough to hurt their chances of having the success they really want.

- **Capacity to Delay Gratification** – Daniel Goldman has built an empire on the famous marshmallow research that showed how 5 year olds who could resist eating marshmallows later turned out to be significantly more likely to be successful and happy as adults. In our instant gratification culture it becomes a rarity to find kids who have this capacity to delay gratification, but clearly those who do, readily get further in life and are far more likely to establish healthy boundaries for themselves when it come to how far they are willing to go in a bad direction. Worst perpetrators of discouragement.

The Center for Confidence and Success offers programs for teens and young adults that helps them to establish these disciplines and qualities in themselves. Because what we do works with them on the deeper level of how they structure their motivations and wants and how this is 'held' in the body, we are often able to have an impact in helping people where other more mental/thinking approaches are not. *Read more about Soma-Semantics™ for a deeper understanding of what this is referring to*

To learn more about how you can participate in this innovative program either through one on one mentoring or in a group or workshop, or to bring one of our programs to your camp or school – contact Jeffrey as soon as possible. 2007 dates are already filling.

References available upon request – Call for a FREE phone consultation.

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Visit our website for a continuation of this article – The 7 Worst Contributors to Teen Failure
(FYI - Self-Esteem Parenting is one of the big ones!)