



Top Ten Challenges Facing High School-Aged Teens*

Diocese of Gary Diocesan Youth Council · June, 2009

** list presented in alphabetical—not ranked—order*

We, the Diocese of Gary Diocesan Youth Council, a representative body of high school-aged leaders from parishes throughout the diocese, spent significant time preparing this list of the Top Ten Challenges Facing High School-Aged Teens. The DYC used a careful discernment and consensus process. We wish to express that in the process of arriving at this list we discussed many issues that did not make this list that are also worthy of discussion in ministry settings.

While we represent a large number of parishes in the diocese, we also recognize that many parishes are not represented on the DYC, and therefore their voice was not heard in the preparation of this document. It is our wish that future Councils revisit this project every five years, so that new Council reps will have their voices—and the voices of the times—heard. We further urge more parishes in the Diocese of Gary to send representatives to the DYC.

We also invite parish leaders to use this list as a discussion starter with youth. Some may agree with items on this list, some may disagree, but it could be the start of good discussions.

Respectfully,

The Diocesan Youth Council, June 2009

Depression

Depression is a feeling beyond sadness that, in serious cases, can lead to suicide. There are different forms of depression, and it is often difficult to detect. Adults sometimes fail to recognize and understand that the situations we teens face are very different from what they face, but our situations are equally as valid. Many factors can lead to depression and everyone reacts differently to these things. Depression is very difficult to avoid. We encourage youth ministers, parents, teachers, etc. to learn about and watch for the warning signs of depression and to never be afraid to lend a hand.

Drugs and Alcohol

Teens get pressured to drink and do drugs all the time and whether or not a teen decides to engage in this behavior impacts his or her image. Friends can pressure you to abuse substances or support you to live a sober lifestyle. Also, teens may use alcohol and drugs to “escape” from their problems. When they do this it can cause lasting effects on teens such as dependency, legal problems, health issues, and regretful decisions. We encourage teens to be a positive influence on their friends by choosing not to engage in these behaviors, and standing up for what they believe.

Faith

Developing a faith life can set you apart from those who don't share your views. Peoples' faith can cause them to lose friends, which is ridiculous. Media influence also adds a great deal of pressure. Most music glorifies drugs and alcohol and other immoral choices. Sometimes religious expectations conflict with societal expectations. Many teens have a hard time deciding what to believe, what to follow, and what to express. This struggle is internal, but it is influenced by many external factors such as peers and media. We encourage teens to have the courage to be proud of their faith and what they believe.

Media

Media includes all electronic and print forms used for sharing of information. The most common in the lives of teens are: internet, TV, and music. Virtually everyone is influenced by some kind of media on a daily basis. It bombards us with some truth, some half-truths, and some lies. Teens have very little influence on the media, because it is controlled by adults. However teens get blamed for the way the media influences them. Teens can monitor how much the media will be able to affect them by making good choices: avoiding immoral behavior, images, and forms of communications, and seeking alternative media outlets.

Money

A major problem facing any teen is the growing responsibility of financial management. They must learn to be thrifty and save for their futures. Teens must distinguish between their personal wants and needs and shouldn't feel the urge to buy something just to fit in with the group. In tough economic times when parents lose their jobs and financial struggles negatively impact the family, teens are often forced to abandon their social activities and get a job to help support the family. Teens should be realistic in their desires for material possessions and responsibly prepare for life after high school, as well.

Personal Image

A teen's social well-being depends largely upon his or her perception of their personal image and identity. Teens often feel insecure about appearance and body image while comparing themselves to peers. They feel that they must compete with others to measure up athletically, musically, scholastically, or in popularity. When teens are rejected from a group, they may feel the deep stress of inadequacy that takes over their lives. Most teens spend a great amount of time concentrating on the aspects of others, hindering their own attempts to find out who they really are. Teens should remember that everyone was created in God's image, to be true to themselves, and to be who God wants them to be.

School

Academic pressures add a large amount of stress to teens' lives. Pressure for high achievement from parents, teachers, and colleges—as well as self-induced pressure—forces students to prioritize their academic success. Also, while being involved in extracurricular activities keeps teens away from negative behaviors and makes them well-rounded individuals, these may create additional sources of stress. Teens should carefully prioritize their time and commitments, because teachers, coaches, leaders, and teammates expect the highest level of commitment from them.

Sex

While the levels may vary from school to school and among different age groups, almost all teens face sexual pressures. The media portrays a carefree attitude about sex, like it's not a big deal, and it happens everyday, all the time and rarely shows the effects or consequences of it. But few things impact the life of a teen more than the consequences of sexual behavior. Teens are often judged by the person they are with, for better or worse. Sexual pressures are different for males and females. For teen males, they are pressured to have sex by their peers, and this contributes to lying and using females. Teen females face the stigma of being viewed as "sleazy," a destroyed social image, and a destroyed self-esteem. Both sexes face guilt. Sex is sold to teens as a thing they should desire, but the consequences—mostly overlooked—are not presented to teens like they could be.

Stereotypes

Teens are naturally afraid to stand out in a group because they will be easily recognized. They try their hardest to fit in because they know they will be judged by their social status, extracurricular activities, athletic ability, educational accomplishments, body image, social involvement, and almost any other characteristic that makes them "different." While bullying may be seen as only a childish behavior, negative rumors toward a teen, whether true or false, may damage his or her reputation in the eyes of peers. When teens become the victims of rumors and criticism—often based on unfair stereotypes—they may feel inferior to others and hatred may build up inside of them. We encourage teens to take the time to get to know one another for who they are, not based on what they do, what they look like, or who they are friends with.

Stress

Teenagers often have a difficult time coping with stress caused by all aspects of their life. This internal conflict may be positive, pushing a teen to the highest possible level of performance. However, as stresses build up and goals aren't achieved, teens may feel inadequate and give up trying. Stress from school, relationships, and family life may hinder a teen's functioning and create psychological problems. Stress is a problem because most teens do not know how to handle it and sometimes resort to harmful behavior. Because teens' lives are often so fast-paced, teens should seek a balance of activities that bring relaxation and rest to the mind and soul. Teens must learn to cope with stress to lead a healthy lifestyle.

For more information on the Diocese of Gary Diocesan Youth Council, contact Kevin Driscoll at 219-769-9292 x229, or visit www.garyoyya.org.