



WALKING alongside strengthening congregational community ministries

»» At-Risk Youth Ministry ««

»» RESOURCES FOR THE JOURNEY

Today's youth face numerous challenges on the path to young adulthood. As the U.S. poverty rate continues to rise, the number of children and youth exposed to at-risk behaviors increases at a proportional rate. Alcohol and drugs are more accessible than ever. The lure of joining a gang is seemingly irresistible in some communities. Teen pregnancy, school drop out rates, suicide and eating disorders are all serious concerns. Churches can be involved in prevention and intervention measures. Some teens simply need a positive adult role model to inspire them with hope, self-esteem and alternative options. Others need more pointed educational, vocational or emotional support. You may find the following resources helpful as you prepare to invest in the lives of at-risk youth.

Books

- *Reclaiming Our Prodigal Sons and Daughters: A Practical Approach for Connecting with Youth in Conflict* by Scott Larson and Larry Brendtro (published by Solution Tree). This book offers a research-based four step approach for reaching at-risk youth. The authors emphasize the role of the spiritual community in cultivating trust, competence, responsibility and commitment. Understanding the importance of these concepts is crucial for any church interested in undertaking ministry to at-risk students.

- *Resiliency In Action: Practical Ideas for Overcoming Risks and Building Strengths in Youth, Families, and Communities* edited by Nan Henderson, Bonnie Benard and Nancy Sharp-Light (published by Resiliency in Action). This resource is a practical guide for schools, agencies and communities who wish to nurture and build upon the natural resilience of at-risk teenagers, families and communities. The book consists of articles and testimonials designed to teach the reader how to reduce risk factors and build resiliency in a person's environment and personal life.

- *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry: From a Strategy of Influence to a Theology of Incarnation* by Andrew Root (published by InterVarsity Press). This book encourages churches to rethink the way they do youth ministry. Root builds on theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer's experience with troubled youth to promote an incarnational ministry to young people based on faithfulness instead of success/failure; this includes meeting students in the midst of their suffering and their environment to become the presence of Christ to them.

Journal Articles

- Sinha, Jill, Cnaan, Ram & Gelles, Richard. (2007) "Adolescent risk behaviors and religion: Findings from a national study." *Journal of Adolescence*, 30(2), 231-249.

This national study of teens found religious involvement to be consistently associated with reduced risk behaviors in the areas of smoking, alcohol use, truancy, sexual activity, marijuana use and depression. It also found that teens value religion and are participating in religious activities.

MORE ON BACK

Websites

- At-Risk Youth - <http://www.at-risk.org>

This easy-to-read website contains valuable information and statistics pertaining to at-risk youth. Topics include teen violence, alcohol and drug abuse, eating disorders, depression, and suicide. Training opportunities and curriculum are also available through this site.

- United States Department of Justice - http://www.usdoj.gov/archive/fbci/progmenu_atrisk.html

The U.S. Department of Justice website contains helpful information about existing at-risk prevention efforts as well as ways for faith-based organizations to apply for grant money.

- The Search Institute - www.search-institute.org

The Search Institute recognizes that positive youth development is dependent upon certain developmental assets, spiritual development, health and an engaged community. This site contains articles and information based on these fundamental needs, as well as links to other valuable websites.

- MENTOR - www.mentoring.org

This site allows you to search existing mentoring programs in your area. You can type in your zip code to find a program near you or click the "Start a Program" link for toolkits that will help you design, plan, manage, operate and evaluate your own program.

- The Urban Institute - <http://www.urban.org>

The Urban Institute website provides policy information regarding various programs and populations including children, youth and families. Many relevant topics are also explored, including adolescent sexual behavior, delinquency and crime, economic well-being, neighborhood influences, child care and development, health and welfare.

Stepping Stones

Brief descriptions of how to implement specific ministries. For each of the five broader areas above, many ministries can be envisioned. We have identified a few of these for each area and have articulated the steps for how that ministry might be planned.

Pathways

Learn from the first-hand account of those already engaged in this specific ministry. Plus, develop networking contacts as go-to sources to explore solutions to challenges or celebrations of successes.

Food for the Journey

A short devotional based on scripture that can be used in church bulletins, as a Moment for Mission during worship or as an introduction to a Bible study.