

## Book Review:

### *Promoting Teen Health: Linking Schools, Health Organizations, and Community.*

Alan Henderson, Sally Champlin, and William Evashwick, (Eds.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. 1998. 272 pp., softcover \$22.95; hardcover \$48.00.

Reviewed by Dixie Atkinson, MS, CHES<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Doctoral student, health education; Southern Illinois University, Carbondale 62901; 618.453.2777 (phone), 618.453.1829 (fax), [DIXAT@SIU.EDU](mailto:DIXAT@SIU.EDU)

As it should be, adolescence is a season of change and experimentation. Yet, not all of the transformations and explorations indicative of the teen years result in healthy consequences.

- One-fourth of all new HIV cases occur in ages 13 to 20.
- Another teen dies in car crash: Alcohol involved.
- A teen couple pleads no contest to child negligent charges.
- An angry 17-year-old guns down classmates.

Far too often, America's news media report similar headlines. No doubt, there appear to be no simple answers for such destructive, yet preventable teen behaviors.

However, *Promoting Teen Health* offers an excellent, in-depth resource for health care and social science professionals involved in a complex journey to help young people cope and succeed during these often trying years. After describing the current teen situation, backed up with current prevalence rates, the authors present reliable primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention programs linking all of those committed to alleviating overwhelming adolescent health problems. Fittingly, diverse teen populations and gender differences are also highlighted in the book's 24 chapters written by 35 authors who display a broad range of expert viewpoints.

Following a brief foreword by Peter Cortese, an authority in adolescent health, Chapter One presents a concise overview describing six of the most serious behaviors that threaten the health of today's teens resulting in, more often than not, entrapment through addiction or negligence, disease, and/or death. The risk behaviors include tobacco, alcohol and other drugs, sexual behaviors contributing to pregnancy and STDs, intentional injuries, unintentional injuries, poor dietary habits, and physical inactivity. In the Chapter One conclusion, the author states that for adolescents to overcome hazardous behaviors and make a healthier transition into adulthood, the cooperation of the entire community is required. This petition for a community shared vision nestled in a sustained attitude of "I care about you" is characteristic of the entire author pool

within the book. It is also reminiscent of a similar cry in Hillary Clinton's book *It Takes a Village: And Other Lessons Children Teach Us* (1996).

Within the majority of the book, Chapter Two through Chapter 13, are expanded discussions of the six categories of adolescent risk behavior. Chapter topics are unintentional injury, physical fitness, nutrition, tobacco use, drug abuse, alcohol use, STDs, HIV/AIDS, teen pregnancy, mental health, youth violence, and family and dating violence. Collectively, the 12 chapters contain definitions, historical reviews, risk factors, current statistics, attitudes, financial considerations, *Healthy People 2000* objectives, prevention strategies, organization and community resources, teaching strategies, comprehensive skills-based programs, conclusions, and references. The addition of tables and figures readily enhance the practical applicability of each chapter, individually, as a shelf reference. Further, these chapters offer pivotal information necessary for accessing and planning effective teen health programs which is in accordance with two of the seven areas of responsibility defined by the National Task Force on the Preparation and Practice of Health Educators [NTFPPHE] (1985).

After Chapter 14 focuses on factors included in winning health education programs, Chapters 15 through 23 detail specific and successful teen health programs of previously mentioned risk categories. These programs are skills-based, culturally sensitive, and largely adolescent-led providing functional information necessary to favorably incorporate peers, family, schools, and the community. The interested reader will find the inclusion of program addresses, phone numbers, funding sources as well as a perspective of each program's success from one of its participants. While embracing all seven of the areas of responsibility (NTFPPHE, 1985), each program's mastery is backed by caring people from diverse cities across the United States. There are three reasons why it would behoove each community in the United States to take heed and adopt similar programs. First, all of these programs are regarded as successful and are thriving. Second, few things are more urgent to a nation's health strategy than its youth. Third, there is

a strong and predictive relationship between youth's health-related behavior and a community social support system.

Appropriately, Chapter 24 concludes the book summarizing the complexity, need, and hope for future teen health programs. As stated by the author:

...problems do not go away. They change and evolve but remain present among our youth...Rather than focusing on health issues that cannot be eradicated, providing a stable context for adolescent development and focusing on skills adolescents need to participate in society as adults are essential... (pp.254-255)

Similarly, as found in the *Bible*, one is reminded to "train up a child in the way he should go; when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:16, Revised Standard Version). Unquestionably, *Promoting Teen Health* will help a community, or a village, do just this.

Nevertheless, this excellent resource of collected salient and effective teen programs for healthcare and social science professionals could be enhanced by placing actual labeled sections where they already look as if to be, but unlabeled. For example, there appears to be five unlabeled sections: overview, teen risk behaviors, factors in successful programs, discussion of the actual programs, and conclusion. Another suggestion that could strengthen the book's overall effectiveness would be to include web sites for program information in Chapters 15 through 23. Next, even though unavoidable, inclusion of prevalence rates necessitates updates, and often these revisions need to be immediate. For example as of June 17, 1998, the federal guidelines labeling a person overweight were lowered deeming more teens overweight than before this date. Therefore, the adolescent obesity problem is more severe than the authors could have imagined. Lastly, even though the authors include physical, mental, emotional, and social changes indicative of the transition from child to adult, the inclusion of spiritual aspects are omitted but warranted. As long as health educators believe in, and continue to include, all five dimensions in wellness models, programs must address what happens when *any* component goes askew.

In conclusion, this timely book is a keeper for both researchers and practitioners as well as health educators interested in helping teens in their transitional years. For example, a few decades ago, a psychiatrist was overheard admonishing a father to "just be nice" to his adolescent, underachieving, angry son. Many years later, the same message rings loud throughout *Promoting Teen Health* as caring mentors

were clearly heralded as the reason behind each successful teen program. It seems that teens mostly want to be cared about so they can find purpose in life, the essence of spirituality, thereby allowing them to "just be nice" to themselves—and others. In deference to the opening thoughts, there may, indeed, be "nice" simple answers. This book gives concrete examples of such answers.

## References

Clinton, H. R. (1996). *It takes a village: And other lessons children teach us*. New York: Simon and Schuster Books.

National Task Force on the Preparation and Practice of Health Educators, Inc. (1985). *A framework for the development of competency-based curricula for entry level health educators*. New York: Author.

---

## Notice to Book Publishers:

To have your books reviewed, please send two (2) copies to:

Mark J. Kittleson, Ph.D.  
Editor-in-Chief, IEJHE  
307 Pulliam Hall, MS 4632  
Southern Illinois University  
Carbondale, IL 62901