

Dangerous Places Your Teen May Search for a Sense of Identity

I played a lot of sports when I was young, but I was best at soccer. It was something I excelled at from an early age. As the years went by the more soccer, and specifically the recognition I received from it, became my identity.

By the time I was halfway through high school it had become ingrained. During a preseason game my junior year I broke my foot straight across and was told I would miss the entire season. For most of that year, I felt lost. The focus of my identity was gone. I didn't know who I was anymore and felt like my value had fallen. As a result, I was often tired and depressed. My grades dropped drastically. It took me a long time to recover from finding my identity in the wrong thing.

The teenage years are filled with uncertainty because the core identity hasn't developed yet. Teens are desperate to find one to give them a sense of stability, self-worth and significance. Sometimes they will grab anything in front of them. Many will place their identity in things that don't last, as I did. It's like building a large house on a pile of sand.

It's dangerous because the foundation is shaky and will cause the structure to eventually come down. We need to make sure our kids are finding their identity and value in something solid and reinforce it while steering them away from the wrong ones.

Here are seven dangerous places teens go to find a sense of identity:

1. Friends and popularity. There's nothing wrong with being

popular, but too often it dictates how teens feel about themselves. They quantify their existence in the amount of people following them on Snapchat, the number of 'likes' they receive, and what parties they are invited to attend. In the end, they create a person they think the masses will like rather than being their authentic selves. The shell gets painted, but in the interior is empty.

2. Boyfriend/Girlfriend. If they don't have one they feel like less of a person or left behind. When they do have a boyfriend or girlfriend they lose themselves in the relationship. It becomes their sole focus and they tend to immerse themselves in the other person's interests and desires. When the relationship ends, they are left with nothing.

3. Looks. In the long term, and sometimes short term, looks change and fade. In the meantime, they will compare themselves with others, obsess over every imperfection and live off of the compliments of others. This is particularly rampant among teen girls.

4. Success. When people define their existence on their success, they will be as good as their last accomplishment. Even when they succeed, there's a shelf life before they will have to go find their next achievement to prove their self-worth. It's an endless cycle of pressure to perform over and over gain. When they fail, they'll identify themselves as failures.

5. Abilities. They will measure their abilities to others and always feel as though their own abilities fall short. There is always someone who is more talented or has a wider range of gifts. There's also no guarantee abilities will last. Age or injury eventually wear down abilities.

6. Having money and stuff. They will feel good about themselves when they have it or have purchased something new. However, this can easily make a person arrogant, self-seeking

and superficial. Then when the money runs out they will feel as empty as their bank account.

7. Being wild. Teens look to receive attention and they will get it however they can. If they aren't receiving the good attention, they will seek out bad attention. In their minds, no attention equates to insignificance. So many will try to gain it by being wild—seeking extreme ways to party and be rebellious.

Where are your kids finding their identity? In our house, our kids are taught that their identity is that they are loved. They were created by a God who loves them and their eternal value that has nothing to do with any of the above. It's a core identity that is solid and lasting. Whether they choose to live in that identity is up to them. {eoa}

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