

To recognize and help teens who are abusing alcohol.

## OVERVIEW

Many teens today face the pressure of their lives feeling alone and inadequate. That is how I spent most of my teen years. Peer pressure was difficult. I compared myself to others and I always fell short. I looked for ways to fit in when there seemed to be no place for me. I never felt special. My parents loved me, but that was not exactly what I was looking for. I was interested in approval from people outside my family. I never found this from my teachers or other people of influence in my life.

In school I was never part of the popular crowd. When I reached eleventh grade, I had decided that I needed to become popular by doing what was "cool" and made you "special"—to drink alcohol. There were two main reasons for choosing to drink: to fit in and to forget that I was a loser. When I drank, I forgot about feeling unpopular and ordinary. So I drank more and became engrossed in a lifestyle that was detrimental to my health and safety.

## PURPOSE OF INTERVENTION

Many teens drink to help them feel accepted by their peer group. Still others drink to forget about their perceived inadequacies in that peer group. Teachers, parents, youth workers, and anyone associated with the development of teenagers need to edify and strengthen the teens they work with. Teens are faced with an assortment of difficult situations everyday. They are constantly redefining their self-image. The apparent inadequacies that teens find in themselves are the focus of many of their self-image problems. If youth workers can help teenagers recognize that most of their inadequacies are non-existent or that any real inadequacies still do not eliminate their uniqueness, then we can help them build a strong identity. A healthy self-image is essential for a teen battling alcohol abuse. This type of intervention aims to reduce the risk of teens abusing alcohol by helping them improve their self-image, so that they will not need to drink to fit in or flee from their inadequacies.

## EXACT NATURE OF INTERVENTION

Youth workers should accentuate the positive in teens and constantly remind them that they are uniquely special in who they are. Love from authority figures is important. Many fears and inadequacies that teens see in themselves are the result of a poor self-image. It is important that children and teenagers are being given a healthy self-image from adults and youth workers.

Teenagers are often obsessed by trying to impress or prove their self-worth. School grades are one barometer of a teen's intelligence and what group they will fit into. It is important that teachers seek ways to encourage their students and remind them that their grades do not determine their self-worth. In church groups, youth workers may have an easier time talking about the self-worth of the teens. It is important to show love and compassion to teens, to allow them to experience the acceptance that they may not receive from their own peer group.

## PRINCIPLES OF INTERVENTION

Let teens know that they are loved and unique. There are no "worthless" teenagers. All teens, no matter what difficulties they have, should know that they are special. They are all gifted in

different ways. Youth workers should always help teenagers understand their self-worth. All of this should be done with the understanding that even if the inadequacies a teen has are not real, they are still real to that teenager.

It is also important to understand the hurt that teens feel. When this is taken seriously, relating to teens will become easier. Understanding the pain is key to helping them fight alcohol abuse.

## PRECAUTIONS

One precaution is the possibility of allowing the teens too much acceptance. In an attempt to help the teen improve his or her self-image, a youth worker might not demand enough of them. Don't let them get away with more than they should, and don't overfeed their ego. Be careful when talking about their uniqueness that it does not lead them to think that they are better than others are or that their uniqueness should take primacy in life. It is important to not create elitist thinkers or arrogant teens.

## IMPLICATIONS

1. The major goal of this type of intervention is to create well-rounded individuals. These individuals should not depend on others for their self-worth, but on a healthy, realistic image of themselves. It also helps lead teens away from the pitfalls of alcohol abuse and towards a substance-free life. These should be our goals and, hopefully, the end results of our labor.

2. It is important to recognize when a teen needs professional help. Youth workers can do much to minimize the risk of alcohol abuse, but some teens will need guidance and resources beyond the youth worker's training. Know the local alcohol intervention groups, and do not hesitate to contact them if you work with a young person or family in need of extra help.

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