

Family ties outdo peer pressure

"The findings from a new longitudinal study on adolescent health offers a blueprint for what works in protecting kids from harm," says Dr. J. Richard Udry, principal investigator of the most comprehensive study of adolescents ever conducted in this country. Udry is Kenan Professor of Maternal and Child Health/Sociology at the Carolina Population Center, the University of North Carolina.

The study shows that teens who feel close to their families are less likely to engage in risky behaviors (smoking cigarettes and marijuana, drinking, or having sex). High expectations from parents for their teen's school performance are nearly as important in preventing risky behaviors as family closeness.

Dr. Udry says parents and professionals have mistakenly believed that the opinions of peers were most important to youngsters. "This is not true, according to our research," says Dr. Udry. "We asked questions of 90,000 teens at 145 schools. We also interviewed over 12,000 stu-

dents in their homes. To insure privacy, teens listened to questions with headphones and typed their answers into lap-top computers.

"The one solid reason for kids taking less risk was a close-knit family," says Dr. Udry. Emotional closeness proved more significant than the amount of time parents spend with teens or when they spend it. Dr. Udry says, "Being available to teens when they need you and letting them know how much you love them is the key to lowering their risk-taking behavior."

The results affirm other studies on teen behavior. For example, 16 percent of the 7th and 8th graders, and 48 percent of those in 9th to 12th grade say they have engaged in sex. And living in a house without easy access to alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, or guns was associated with less risk-taking.

The National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health confirms much of what my book, "Healthy Teens," says about risk behavior. My goal was to provide facts about the teen culture, and to promote family support and involvement.

In preparing a third edition of "Healthy Teens," I have been reading broadly. One outstanding book is "The Romance of Risk: Why Teenagers Do the

Things They Do," by Lynn E. Ponton, M.D. (Basic Books, 1997, \$25). Dr. Ponton is a clinical psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, and professor of psychiatry at the University of California. She is an extraordinary writer as well as having had many years in clinical practice.

Dr. Ponton says, "In truth, most teens are not at high risk to get locked into patterns of unhealthy behavior. Teens need risks in order to grow; they need parental support in order to take those risks. If the risk-taking becomes dangerous, then, of course, parents must act. But when we assume that all adolescent risk-taking is bad, we fail to recognize both the very real dangers some risks pose and the tremendous benefits that others can yield. This understanding requires nothing less than a radical shift in attitude—about risk, about adolescents, and about parenting."

"This book does not seek to glamorize or romanticize the world of dangerous behaviors," Dr. Ponton says. "My hope instead is to provide a new understanding of why and how

adolescents take unhealthy risks, and to suggest how parents and others can encourage healthy risk-taking as a preventive measure against unhealthy risk behaviors and as worthwhile activities in their own rights."

Dr. Ponton's book is about real adolescents, real parents, and the real reasons why adolescents take dangerous risks. "The Romance of Risk" adds credence to the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health. I am more than ever convinced of the importance of parent involvement in teens' lives.

The first results from the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health are discussed in the Journal of the American Medical Association (September 10, 1997, Volume 278, # 10).

Birmingham resident, Alice R. McCarthy, Ph.D., is a nationally known parent educator, writer, and editor. To order Dr. McCarthy's book, *Healthy Teens*, send \$8.50 to Bridge Communications, Inc., 1450 Pilgrim Road, Birmingham, Michigan 48009.

CSS seeks parenting helpers

Catholic Social Services of Oakland County needs "parent partners" to provide companionship in their Teen Parent Program. "Partners" act as a mentor and support person for a teen through pregnancy and following birth. Volunteers would visit or call their teen once a week and also participate in a Lannze class and coach the teen during the birth of a child. Most teens in the program live in northern Oakland County. To volunteer, call Sharon Longbucco, (248) 333-3700, ext. 122.

Upland Farms Pumpkin Festival fills weekends

The Pumpkin Festival at Upland Hills Farm is an ideal way for a family to enjoy a 35-year tradition of seeing the fall color and taking a horse drawn hayride to the pumpkin patch through 240 acres of rolling hills to make your selection.

It's going on every Saturday and Sunday in October from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the Upland Hills Farm, 481 Lake George Road, Oxford in Northeast Oakland County. General admission is \$5.50 for children/\$7.50 adults, which includes a pumpkin for everyone,

the hayride to and from the pumpkin patch, sheep shearing demonstrations, Shuler's Maple Show, Chautauque Express (musical family entertainment). You can visit the barns, pet all the animals, hold a baby pig, feed the ducks and geese or even milk a cow.

Pony rides and a haunted house tour are each \$2.00. Concessions, cider and doughnuts are available, or you may bring a picnic lunch. For directions or information, the office is open 9 a.m.-5 p.m., Mon.-Fri., (248) 628-1611.

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