



Importance of Developing A Healthy Self-Concept in Teens

Stan Weed, PhD, Founder and Director of the Institute for Research and Evaluation, puts it this way:¹

In working with the concept of Personal Identity, that is, one's sense of identity -- how they see themselves, what they stand for, where they're going with their lives, and what constitutes their responsibility to others -- I have found that one's sense of identity is foundational to how one responds to the stimuli that come into their lives.

When young adults are provided with an opportunity to carefully examine their personal identity, they are able to identify where they believe themselves to be in regard to certain dimensions of their lives and where they would like to be. They begin to recognize whether there is a gap there.

When they consider where they are now and where they would like to be – as a man or woman, in their career, as a husband or wife, a father or mother – this exercise in self-examination helps them identify not just who they are, but subsequently how they want to live. They ultimately decide that certain behaviors will violate their own sense of identity – not only as currently defined, but how they want it to be in the future.

This is a fundamental paradigm shift from how we typically address risk behavior. When we study young people that don't engage in risk behavior, what we find is that they have a healthy self-concept (not to be confused with self-esteem) that they do not want to violate. By providing young adults with support for recognizing and restructuring their sense of identity, we provide them with a whole new avenue for considering the benefits, to themselves and those around them, of healthy behavior.

¹ Personal Communication with Heritage, January, 2011