

**It's Not Just Sex Anymore:
Understanding Risky Behaviors in
Today's Adolescents**

Ethan D. Schafer, Ph.D.
Clinical Child Psychologist
Spectrum Psychological Associates, Inc.

Introductions and Goals

- Using developmental science to move beyond fear and myth.
- Americans are sexual illiterates.
- Issues for older campers and younger staff.
- Communication skills and staff training.

Is Sex Really Everywhere?

- YES. And it has been this way for decades.
 - Example: Aerosmith and “Walk This Way”
 - Example: Dion and the Belmonts
- But, it is different now.
 - Example: The internet, pornography, communication
- Increase in intensity and availability

Americans and Sex: Some Facts

- By age seventeen, over 50 percent of teenagers have engaged in oral sex.
- Between 5 percent and 30 percent (depending on various background factors) of thirteen- year-olds have had sexual intercourse.
- More than nine million new cases of STDs are contracted by Americans between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four every year
- Think of what you campers and staff “bring to camp” now vs. 10 years ago, 20 years ago, etc.

Adolescent Sexuality

- In general, sexuality in adolescence is a critical part of development
 - What kind of sexual being am I?
 - What is okay and what isn't?
 - What are my moral and ethical values?
 - What, exactly, constitutes sex?
- Social norms have changed since the famous Kinsey Reports.
 - 1948 and 1953 data: 20% of girls, 45% of boys had intercourse by 19.
 - 1988 data: 68% of females, 78% of males.
 - 2002 data from the CDC: 60% of females, 61% of males.

Adolescent Sexuality

- Media portrayal of casual sex without emotional or medical consequences.
 - Teens watch average of 3 hours of TV per day, 75% acknowledge it affects behavior.
- American teens are, by far, the most sexually illiterate of Western industrialized countries.
 - We are pregnant, violent, and disease-ridden: We're # 1.
- Increased acceptance of homosexuality, even in high school, even in last ten years.
- Marriage is much further off for teens today.
- We have changed roles and pressures, yet we don't expect behaviors and feelings to change?
 - Adolescent sexual behavior and what they are afraid to ask.
 - Fear of laughter and rejection.
 - Beyond “sex education”, and moving to emotional education.
 - At home, not at camp
- Rape, sexual coercion, and abuse are all too common.

Training Staff to Handle Sexual Issues

- Blurred line of development between older campers and younger staff.
- Kids talk about sex all the time, despite lack of knowledge.
- We have to empower our staffs to set limits for the summer during staff training

Training Staff to Handle Sexual Issues

- Set clear limits about behavior that is considered appropriate
- Be specific: Staff should never discuss sexual history with campers, nor encourage them to do so.
 - This is usually not a matter of “not knowing”
 - There are other things to bond over.
- Prepare staff for common issues:
 - Hygiene issues
 - Innocent vs. Provocative questioning
 - What are you comfortable answering?
 - Correcting some misinformation
- Role-plays:
 - Prepare for the mild, moderate, and scary situations
 - Practice listening in pairs
 - Validate and Redirect
 - Confrontation with Concern

Self-Mutilating Behavior

- SMB is the act of deliberately harming oneself without suicidal intent.
 - They are (usually) NOT trying to kill themselves.
- Perhaps as many as 14% of teens will engage in some form of SMB at least once.
 - Cutting, hitting/pinching, and burning are probably most common
 - Much more common in girls.
- Why would anyone do this?
 - Unfortunately, it “works.”
 - Not a cognitive issue: The emotional fallout and how typical reactions from adults make it worse.
- A musical example of the experience

Self-Mutilating Behavior: Training Your Staff

- Identification and immediate notification of parents when the camper or counselor is a minor.
- Following steps to “communicate the communication” to the camper.
 - Empathy: When have you done something even though you “knew” you shouldn’t?
 - Reflective listening, praising their courage
 - DO NOT “EDUCATE” ABOUT CONSEQUENCES
 - State the necessity of the communication with directors/parents.
 - Structure the future and give reassurance.

Teen Substance Abuse

- Substance use among high school juniors:
 - 70% trying regular alcohol use
 - 40% admit to binge drinking
 - Just over 50% have smoked cigarettes
 - About one-third in the last month
 - About 40% have tried marijuana
 - About 25% have tried illicit drugs
 - Huge increase in use of Ecstasy, opiates, prescription drugs, hallucinogens, and inhalants
- Substance use among girls nearly matches that of boys.
- “Experimentation” vs. frequent use vs. self-medicating.
 - Communicating and avoiding traps: Make your expectations clear

Conclusions

- Listen to understand, within boundaries.
- Remember that camp is a chance to get away from pressures in today’s society.
- Prepared staff are less nervous, more confident, and more apt to do the right thing.
- Thanks for attending!
- I can be reached at (440) 666 3053 or EthanSchafer@yahoo.com
