



UNDERSTANDING TODAY'S YOUTH

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7 Youth Culture Trends Every Parent Should Know*

Actress Amy Poehler plays Leslie Knope, the perky, mid-level bureaucrat on the NBC sitcom *Parks and Recreation*. She meets a girl and two boys all holding hands in the hallway outside her office. The girl introduces her boyfriend Derek and his boyfriend Ben. Leslie looks a bit puzzled and wants to know how this works. She explains Derek is straight for her and gay for Ben and she hates Ben. Ben assures Leslie that it's not that complicated.

The camera then cuts to Leslie sitting at her desk and she says, "The trouble with youth culture is I don't understand it." If you're like many parents, you would probably agree. The simple days of youth have been replaced by a myriad of movements which adults find disconcerting. At the heart of most of them is the constant influence of media and technology which have the power to shape beliefs, behaviours, attitudes, and worldviews.

This issue of *Understanding Today's Youth* will cover 7 of the many current youth culture trends that parents need to be aware of. These and others are covered in greater depth with practical helps for parents and youth workers in Paul Robertson's latest seminar of the same title.

CULTURE QUOTES

"No matter what you may think, if you are over the age of 25, you don't understand what it is like to be a teenager."

~ Paul Robertson

*For more practical helps on these trends and others, book the complete 2 hour, multi-media seminar "7 Youth Culture Trends Every Parent Should Know" by Youth Unlimited's Youth Culture Specialist, Paul Robertson, phone **416-520-6831** or email: **paul@paulrobertson.ca** for all the details.

1 Growing Importance of Self and Individuality

The current generation is engaged in a growing love affair with the new "holy trinity" of Me, Myself, and I. Thinking only of themselves, they love an audience who is equally enamored with them. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat become great places to build up one's self-importance. After all, it has nothing to do with "sharing" and everything to do with "showing." Many become self-absorbed with their world revolving around only them and no one else.

The preoccupation with self is reflected in the endless flow of personal minutiae that is posted every minute of every day. Ravi Zacharias says that kids and media have now become one as they can no longer be separated. Today, their personal identities are being formed through online presentations of a self that may or may not reflect true life. Images and profiles are normally enhanced to make them appear better and more beautiful than the person in the mirror. Pop media answers all the important questions for kids including who the most important person in your life should be and that person is you.



Marketers also find ways to appeal to the daily "me" moment for our kids and focus products to help enhance their sense of importance.

A growing portion of the adolescent population is developing *Teen Narcissistic Personality Disorder*. They are consumed with focusing on themselves and supporting their own well-being, which makes it difficult for them to recognize or consider the thoughts, needs, or desires of others. Parents need to watch for such indicators as excessive bragging, thinking they are more important than others, monopolizing conversations to their own agendas, having a short temper when challenged by others, believing they deserve great praise, and having unrealistic hopes or expectations.

2 Pervasiveness of Online Pornography



Previous generations had to go looking for porn. Today, porn finds them. According to the website “Fight the New Drug”, porn sites receive more regular traffic than Netflix, Amazon, and Twitter combined. A staggering 93% of boys and 62% of girls are exposed to Internet pornography before the age of 18 with the average first exposure being age 11.

This generation of young people are pioneers in the new world of pervasive pornography. No one has ever gone where they are

going and they are virtually without a moral roadmap; no one to guide and warn them as they grow. The vast majority of parents are unaware of what their kids are accessing online.

A study by Australian researchers at the University of New South Wales and the University of Melbourne indicates an association between Internet pornography and the sexual health of teenagers. Data showed that young people who reported having visited sexually explicit websites were more likely to have

higher numbers of sexual partners, engage in a wider diversity of sexual practices, and use alcohol or drugs in association with sexual encounters.

Sexually explicit materials and images are finding our kids well before puberty and often leave them with disturbing effects. Many are left with the impression that this is what true love is and that everyone is doing it. They often abandon the hope of remaining sexually pure until marriage and grow up believing that marriage is restrictive and unfulfilling. Others begin to think the sexual perversions they see are the new normal. In many ways online porn has become the new sex education curriculum.

Parents must never assume their children are immune to viewing such material. Asking your kids on a regular basis if they have been looking at things they shouldn't be is probably the best defense followed by healthy conversations about the problems that come with internet pornography. Tim Chester's book “*Closing the Window: Steps to Living Porn Free*” is a great resource on this topic.

3 Cyberbullying—Cool to be Cruel

Cyberbullying is the electronic posting of mean-spirited messages about a person often done anonymously. Behavioural experts believed that if we just provided enough educational information on cyberbullying, the problem would go away. However, the opposite seems to be true. Things have only gotten worse for many teens given the proliferation of media devices in Canada. Ipsos Reid 2013 reports a significant increase of mobile device ownership with 43% of teens owning a smartphone while 61% own MP3 players such as the web-enabled Apple iPod Touch. All are great devices but they also come with the potential to be harassed online.

Ipsos reports in their Canadian study that 20% of teens have witnessed online bullying, 14% have received inappropriate comments through social networks, and 51% said they have had a negative experience on social networks. The school yard bully has retreated to

the Internet where he or she can remain anonymous and say even more malicious things than if they were in person.

Signs your child may be a victim of bullying include an abrupt lack of interest in school, taking a unusual route to school, suffering a drop in grades, withdrawing from family and school activities, being hungry after school because they lost their lunch money, stealing money with lame excuses, making a beeline to the bathroom, and becoming sad, sullen or angry after a phone call or reading text messages.

Parents are often surprised when their kids don't tell them about being bullied. However, for the young person it is logical. They are ashamed of being bullied, are afraid of retaliation, believe it is just part of growing up, don't think anyone can help, and don't think anyone will help.

Moms and dads can take a proactive position on cyberbullying in a number of ways.



First, praying for your children and their friends is good place to start. *Second*, get to know your children and their real-world friends as well as asking how things are going online. *Third*, teach and model to your children the importance of treating all people with love, grace and mercy. *Finally*, teach your children to respect others and to take a stand in defense of the victims.

4 Increasing Number of Mental Health Issues

Growing up has never been easy: ask any teenager. Every generation has had its issues to deal with. Life for today's teens is complicated by too much information from the Internet and too little input from encouraging adults. They face the pressures of living in an “immediate world” with constant feedback from their social platforms. Young people face tremendous pressure to succeed and live with more exposure to dangers than previous generations. Teens never seem to be offline long enough to mentally rest and recover.

In a report released in May 2015, the Canadian Institute for Health Information shows ER visits for mental health issues among Canadians aged five to 24 jumped 45 per cent between 2006–2014. Over the same eight-year period, rates of in-patient hospitalizations that involved at least one overnight stay rose 37 per cent for this age group.

The study found that the highest use of hospital services was among youth aged 15 to



17, with ER visits rising by 53 per cent and in-patient hospitalizations up by 74 per cent. Children ages 10–14 also experienced a major increase in hospital services use, with ER visits

jumping by 68 per cent and hospital admissions growing by 64 per cent. **On any given day, half of the hospital beds being used by young people involve treatment for mental health issues.**

Many of their mental health issues deal with stress and anxiety. Kids are getting stressed out at younger and younger ages for a variety of reasons. Young people need three things to grow up free from stressors. One, children need a safe environment. Home needs to be a place where kids can safely take shelter from the culture storms that swirl around them. Two, they need to feel wanted and valued. A sense of acceptance and worth needs to come from parents and family not from the Internet. Three, kids need direction. Parents need to be engaged and involved in the lives of their children. They need to be communicating and spending time together. As one psychologist said, “Parents need to spend more time directing than correcting.”

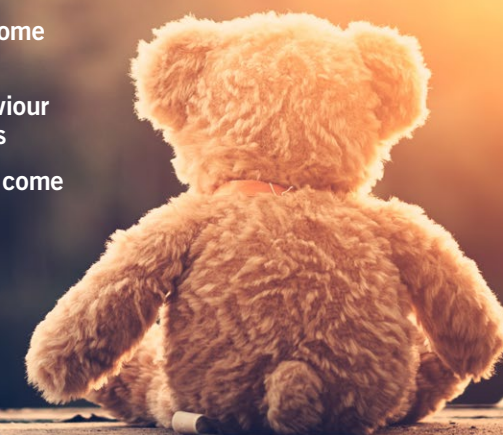
5 Rising Social Cost of Fatherlessness

A recent documentary called Irreplaceable from Focus on the Family, New Zealand, confirms what research around North America has shown for years—the absence of a father in the life of a child has devastating consequences.

The changing face of families in Canada should also cause us concern. According to Statistics Canada, there are nearly one million children in our country under the age of 14 who go to bed each evening without saying goodnight to their fathers because their dads no longer live in the same house. StatsCan also predicts that over 40 percent of all marriages in 2008 will end in divorce before 2035. Based on current patterns, divorce is most likely to happen within the first five years of marriage.

David Popenoe, author of *Families Without Fathers*, reminds us of the significant part a father plays in the life of his kids. The way a father plays with his children has effects on everything from the management of emotions to intelligence and academic performance. By simply loving and interacting with their off-

- 71% of high school dropouts come from fatherless homes
- 71% of teen girls who get pregnant come from homes without fathers
- 85% of children identified with behaviour disorders come from fatherless homes
- 90% of homeless and runaway youth come from fatherless homes
- 63% of teens who commit suicide had no fathers at home
- 85% of young men in prison come from fatherless homes



“Irreplaceable”—Focus on the Family

spring, fathers teach them they are love-worthy which in turn builds strong self-esteem. A father's involvement has also been linked to improved verbal and problem-solving skills.

Another great resource for dads is Paul

Robertson's 30 minute message on *Strong Fathers for Challenging Times* which can be found in the podcasts at www.paulrobertson.ca. It focuses on the five key roles fathers need to play for kids growing up in times such as these.

6 Facebook Depression



Theologian G.K. Chesterton wrote, “Meaninglessness does not come from being weary of pain, but meaninglessness comes from being weary of pleasure. We have exhausted ourselves in the indulgent culture.” The year was 1925. Chesterton knew that materialism could never make you happy. Today, we have a generation of kids who think that technology is their ticket to happiness.

Facebook is a bit of an enigma. It allows you stay in touch with literally hundreds of people but you need to be alone to use it. Kids are either by themselves in front of their computer or relationally isolating themselves when using their smartphones in the presence of others. Nothing says you don’t exist like when someone takes a phone call or text message while you are sitting there. Regardless, it creates a

number of challenges for teens.

First, Facebook is always a test for our honesty and integrity. How honest do I have to be when posting pictures and comments? Many kids find themselves dealing with the fallout of things that were less than truthful on their social platforms.

Second, kids are facing a plague of presentation anxiety as they work to form their self-identities online. They are always looking for ways to tweak and enhance their pictures. Skinny Camera is a 99¢ phone app that promises to whittle your waist and make you look 10 to 20 pounds slimmer. A lot of Christian kids are also pushing the limits on integrity. Finding the balance between your real self and who you are online is a stressful exercise. However, the “real me” is rarely the one you see on Facebook.

Finally, everything a teen posts is critiqued

and evaluated by everyone. “The 100 Club” is the latest social media obsession for teens that is causing anxiety. Teens post a picture on Facebook or Instagram and hope for as many “likes” as possible. They consider 100 likes or more, good. Less is a poor showing, even embarrassing. Some teens say they’ll delete pictures that don’t hit 100 or more likes. Self-identity quickly becomes the sum total of all the lists and likes a young person acquires along with all the comments and feedback about them. Their lives are now lived out in front of hundreds of people most of whom do not even know them personally.

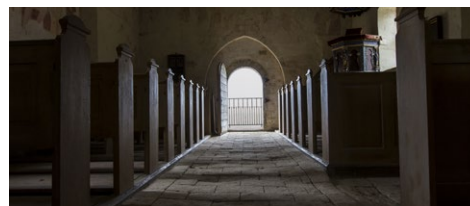
The isolation and very nature of technology can lead them into anxiety, depression, and even suicide. Parents need to pay close attention to the moods and attitudes of their kids during and after their time online.

7 Abandoning the Faith

The Macleans Magazine headline on April 7, 2009 served as a wake-up call to all of us who care about the future of the local church in Canada. “Youth Survey: Teens lose faith in droves. Islam and atheism are on the rise while Christianity fades.” The Project Teen Canada survey showed that only 21% of Canadian teens were attending religious services weekly while 47% never attended. Reginald Bibby, author of the report said, “For years I have been saying that, for all the problems of organized religion in Canada, God has continued to do well in the poll, that is no longer the case.”

In 2012, Dr. John Wilkinson echoed the same concerns in his preface to *Hemorrhaging Faith*, a Canadian study of why young people are leaving their faith. “The findings will confirm some of what you as the reader will likely al-

ready know anecdotally: many who have grown up in church are no longer engaged in that context by the time they reach their adult years. More specifically, the transitions from children’s ministry to junior high ministry to senior high



ministry to the diverse trajectories of young adulthood (e.g., university, travel, work, marriage) are very obvious exit points when members of the younger generation end up leaving the local church.”

Youth Unlimited has talked to an endless

number of parents who express the same concern. “My kids don’t want to go to church any more. Every Sunday morning is a battle. What’s going on?”

Hemorrhaging Faith identified three common justifications for withdrawing from church participation. *First*, young people see themselves as too busy for church. They are learning to balance schedules and make priorities but Sunday morning service isn’t one of them. *Second*, believing they can do faith alone—they say they love Jesus but not the church; being part of a congregation is optional. *Third*, the majority of non-attenders say that church is pointless and not worth the effort. For many of them, church is just an “empty obligation” or a “routine.” The returns are of little value compared to the investment required.



Pop culture got your kids? Youth Unlimited wants to help you get them back.

Youth Culture Specialist Paul Robertson has 19 seminars to help you deepen your relationship with the young people in your life by better understanding their culture. All articles were written by Paul.

To book Paul for your group call 416-520-6831 or check www.paulrobertson.ca for details.