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## Americans see crisis of morals among teens

By Cheryl Wetzstein  
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American adults are convinced that today's teen-agers face a crisis of character that only a crash course in morals and values can solve, a major study released today says.

"Most Americans look at today's teen-agers with misgiving and trepidation, viewing them as undisciplined, disrespectful and unfriendly," says a Public Agenda study called "Kids These Days:

What Americans Really Think About the Next Generation."

In fact, only 37 percent of the 2,000 adults and 32 percent of the 600 teens polled said they believed that the next generation would "help make this country a better place," the New York-based research group said.

The crux of the problem is the failure of parents, schools and society to teach morals and values to children, a majority of adults said

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# TROUBLES FACING TEENS

A Public Agenda telephone poll of 2,000 adults found great concern about the morals and values of teen-agers. Following are problems adults think are the most troubling to teens:

Percentage agreeing this is a "very serious" problem facing teens today					
	General public	All parents	Black parents	Hispanic parents	White parents
Drug and alcohol abuse	71%	69%	79%	83%	67%
Excessive sex and violence on TV and in movies	69	71	76	75	71
Crime and gangs	62	64	77	77	60
Failure to learn values, such as honesty, respect and responsibility	61	63	67	66	62
Welfare programs that encourage single-parent families and teen pregnancy	58	57	66	62	55
Public schools that fail to provide a good education	49	52	60	53	49
Fewer families teaching religious faith and values	49	50	58	55	48
Economic pressure on their parents	44	44	60	53	42
Lack of strong communities where neighbors care about them	40	44	58	45	41
A shortage of government programs that support youth	27	30	47	36	27

Source: "Kids These Days: What Americans Really Think About the Next Generation," June 1997, Public Agenda

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## POLL

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in the study, which was conducted in December for Ronald McDonald House Charities and the Advertising Council.

Solutions, it said, were to give more support to parents, teach values in school and create more after-care activities.

Headlines have been rife with stories about callous teens:

- A New Jersey teen-ager who gave birth at her prom and then returned to the dance floor was charged with murder Tuesday after an autopsy concluded the baby was strangled and left in a plastic bag taken from the sanitary-napkin receptacle in the bathroom.

"Go tell the boys we'll be right out," 18-year-old Melissa Drexler yelled to a friend in the bathroom before using the sharp edge of the receptacle to cut the umbilical cord and dumping the body of the newborn boy in a trash can June 6.

- Three Michigan teen-agers who hopped a freight train last week and mistakenly got off in a crumbling section of Flint were attacked by at least six men age 16 to 23, all arrested Monday. Michael Carter, 14, was fatally shot in the head. A 14-year-old girl was raped by more than one of the attackers and then shot in the face. A 14-year-old boy was shot in the head.

Police said robbery was the motive; the suspects got \$10, all from the girl, and later told officers they were out to "jack somebody."

- Dianne Zamora, an 18-year-old midshipman at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, and her boyfriend, Air Force Academy cadet David Graham, 18, are accused of murdering a 16-year-old girl on Dec. 4.

Mr. Graham had had a "one-night stand" with the victim, Adrienne Jones, who was shot twice in the head, according to the man's confession to police.

Miss Zamora "told him the only way for him to make it right was to kill her," said Grand Prairie police Detective Alan Patton. "Their motivation for doing this was his guilt, their passion for each other and her anger."

Young people get the idea they can kill their newborns when leading authorities refuse to ban partial-birth abortions, Robert Morrison, senior education adviser at the Family Research Council, said yesterday.

Other negative influences on

children are anti-religious views in some institutions, taxes that are so high that both parents must work, outrageous behavior by entertainers and other public figures, and schools that teach that "all outcomes are legitimate," he said.

"Schools should teach the difference between right and wrong, and parental authority needs to be respected and understood," Mr. Morrison added. "If parents object to their children reading [certain things], they shouldn't be called censors."

There have been shocking stories recently, and "there's a moral crisis, no doubt about it, but I'm hesitant to paint all teens with the same broad brushstroke," said Focus on the Family youth-culture analyst Bob Smithouser.

"A lot of teens are 'unsung heroes' and don't get the credit they deserve," he said, citing a class of seniors in Peoria, Ill., who gave the \$11,000 they had saved for a class trip to a drug-rehabilitation center to prevent it from closing.

Not surprisingly, many of the Public Agenda study's 600 teens answered questions differently from the study's adults.

Sixty-one percent strongly agreed with the statement, "I am usually happy," while even larger majorities expressed trust in their parents, friends and God.

But the teens agreed with adults that they faced significant problems — and significant numbers said kids need more adult guidance and attention, and that many parents fail to discipline their children.

According to the 2,000 adults in the Public Agenda study, the best solutions to the moral crisis of children are to:

- Bolster and promote intact families, including giving working parents flexible work hours and discouraging divorce.
- Reach out to disaffected youth.
- Teach traditional standards of behavior, such as being responsible, timely and self-disciplined, in public schools.
- Develop more and better after-school programs, including activities with volunteer groups.
- Help parents control children by setting public curfews.

The problem of sex and violence in the media didn't appear to have a solution, the study noted.

Although adults complain intensely about the media, not even half thought pressuring the media "to return to the days when most media content was at the 'G' or 'PG' level" would be effective.