

YOUTH AT RISK:

Studies of the problems facing children indicate that no matter what problem is studied, such as substance abuse, teen pregnancy, or suicide, the basic root causes are very much the same. It is very clear that we need to focus more of our efforts in the area of prevention.

Unfortunately, in our rush to deal with the problems, we have concentrated our efforts in the area of increasing requirements and gaining more control over youth and making things “tougher” on them. We have actually made very few efforts to deal with the human element and the emotional climate in which our children are expected to grow and develop.

A report published by the Utah Youth Enhancement Association clearly summarizes what we know about what our children need. The report documents the following clear conclusions:

1. Our population of “youth-at-risk” is sufficiently large to be of major concern. At least half of our youth need more help than they are now getting. The size of the problem suggests that we MUST either engage in a major prevention effort or “face social chaos in the decades ahead.”
2. Emotional and personal bonding to home, school, and community prevents misbehavior, lack of it causes misbehavior.
3. Children who care about their parents, who are knowledgeable about and interested in their parents’ expectations, and children who are strongly attached emotional to their parents are much less likely to be delinquent. When strong bonds are not present with home and school, peers are there to fill the void.
4. Clear and consistent values are critical to successful child development.
5. When the home, school and community form a partnership with youth, the consequences are predictable: reduced emotional anxiety and enhanced academic achievement.
6. Wise parents and teachers use their position to support jointly developed rules; the unwise impose their authority and their rules. The former corrects bad behavior, the latter compounds it.
7. School and community climate is a major contributing influence on children’s drug-using behavior.
8. Programs which encourage students to feel part of the community and to become committed to setting and achieving goals, hold promise for preventing delinquency.
9. Lower verbal ability has been found to correlate with delinquency. In several ways it increases the likelihood of school failure and of aggressive behavior.
10. Under stress the higher order brain centers begin shutting down. While rote learning will continue, higher and more complex learning is inhibited if not prohibited.
11. Teachers and adults in the surrounding community can have a great influence over the behavior of youth and support student achievement through planning and involvement in meaningful activities as well as through effective instruction, and classroom management.
12. We start losing many young people in Junior High School P.E. classes, which are focused too highly on competitive sports and give preference to those students who already have highly developed physical and athletic skills. In the early and pre-teen years, youth need active participation in physical activity programs free of competitive pressure.