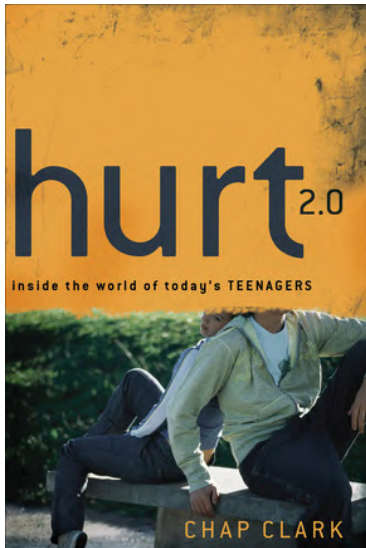


Save time ■ Save money ■ Stay equipped



Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers

INTRODUCTION

On the surface, teens seem light and carefree. But there is another, darker side filled with the stress and strain of personal survival in a hostile world. Adults either believe that contemporary youth are nurtured, well-adjusted, and motivated or that they are at-risk and in dire straits. Both perspectives are valid and real, but on different levels. The premise of this book is that adolescents have been cut off from adults for far too long. They have been abandoned. In response, they have created their own world to protect themselves from the destructive forces of adult society. May this truth open your eyes to the world of young people, the world beneath.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chap Clark is associate provost for strategic projects and professor and chair of the Youth, Family, and Culture Department at Fuller Theological Seminary. He also serves as director of the Student Leadership Project and is the School of Theology's representative on the executive board of the Fuller Youth Institute (FYI). He has authored, coauthored, and edited numerous books, articles, and videos.

CHAPTER 1: THE CHANGING FACE OF ADOLESCENCE

There is widespread belief that teenagers of every generation are basically the same: spoiled, lazy, difficult, disrespectful. "Kids are kids, and they're no different than when I was a kid." This book contends that adolescence is a fundamentally different thing than it was even thirty years ago. Postmodern culture, changes in family systems, new ways of thinking about morality, and a number of other cultural shifts have thrown a wrench into standard developmental theory.

Adolescence: What Is It?

Are teenagers big, more sophisticated children or inexperienced young adults? This foggy view and the speed of cultural shifts have given rise to much adult ambivalence toward teenagers. Their needs are often neglected and they are left on their own to navigate toward adulthood. Adolescence is not a blend of child and adult, nor an expanded phase of either. It is a unique phase with its own developmental characteristics: attaining autonomy, moving toward community, belonging, and interdependence, and the search for a unique identity.

No part of this document may be reproduced without prior written consent.

© 2013 Youth Ministry Book Summaries. All rights reserved

Youth Ministry Book Summaries: Hurt 2.0

The Timing and Duration of Adolescence.

It has been said that adolescence “begins in biology and ends in culture.” It is generally accepted that it begins with puberty, but it ends when culture affirms one’s entrance into adult society—not as easy to define. The age of puberty for girls has been steadily declining from fourteen-and-a-half a century ago to just under 12 today. Adolescence can last until the mid to late twenties as young people take longer to finish education, marry, have children, and become financially independent. A developmental phase that began as a two year process can now last fifteen years. Whereas adolescence used to be marked by two distinct stages—early and late—a third stage of *midadolescence* has emerged generally corresponding to ages 15 through 18.

The Impact of a Changing Culture

As society began to unravel, beginning with the social upheaval of the 1960’s, fragmented adults began to seek their own emotional and relational survival. Adolescents were generally left to fend for themselves as parents sought to find their own way in life. This pattern of systemic rejection, this abandonment, is the root of the fragmenting and distancing that mark adolescent culture. Changing definitions of “family”, surging divorce rates, and other destructive parental choices left teens to discern and survive a lengthened adolescence.

Why This Book?

Adults understand very little of the inside life of teenagers. Most adults believe that teens are the same as they’ve always been. Institutions that were designed to nurture children have lost their missional mandate and systematically abandoned the young. Young people are desperate for an adult who cares. Every adult needs to struggle with what our choices have done to our young and to our society.

CHAPTER 2: ABANDONMENT—THE DEFINING ISSUE FOR ADOLESCENTS

There is an ongoing debate between those who describe adolescents as “happy, healthy, flourishing, and resilient” and those that see this generation as “wounded, at-risk, and in trouble.” Those who see teens as happy and healthy fail to understand the reality of the inner lives of today’s adolescents. The truth is they are both resilient and deeply wounded. The culture is not as attentive to the needs of its young, and teens are often left to struggle to find their identity without adult guidance. They are forced to survive on their own and design their own world and social systems. In short, they have been *abandoned*. They have not turned their backs on the adult world. Rather, they have been forced by a sense of abandonment to band together and create their own world.

Abandonment By External Systems

Organizations originally designed to serve, nurture, guide, and protect the young (sports, music, dance, drama, even some religious activities) have become adult-driven, adult-controlled programs more interested in institutional perpetuation and fulfilling adults’ needs, agendas, and dreams. Many adults will point to such activities as proof of their commitment to their young. Driving is support, being active is love, and providing every possible opportunity is selfless nurture. We have forgotten how to be together and have ignored the developmental needs of individuals in favor of organizations’ goals. By

Youth Ministry Book Summaries: Hurt 2.0

the time they reach adolescence, our young have been pushed and molded to become a person whose value rests in his or her ability to serve someone else's agenda. Even if done with the best of intentions, this type of parenting becomes a subtle form of abandonment.

Abandonment By Internal Systems and Relationships

Adolescents have suffered the loss of safe relationships that served as the primary place of nurture for those transitioning from child to adult. The family is often so concerned with the needs, struggles, and issues of parents that the emotional needs of children go unmet. The greater the self-absorption of the parents, the less able they are to guide the young to a healthy identity. The result is loneliness and isolation—a central adolescent experience.

The Consequences of Abandonment

Every single young person may readily be described as “at-risk.” They may be one major event away from falling into despair. Throughout history, adolescents have learned to become adults by observing, imitating, and interacting with adults. When this is denied, the adolescent journey is lengthened because they have no one to show the way. When they know that they are essentially on their own, they pull away from the adult world for survival. They depend on each other for community and create their own society with its own rules, values, and worldview.

Every study done shows that teens desperately need and want significant relationships with the adults around them. They want the safety that healthy boundaries provide, but that have little trust in the adult society that has abandoned them. If adults cannot be trusted to be authentic, selfless, advocates teens will flee to their own world. We must be willing to go into their world to connect with them and to strive to change the systems and structures that have caused them such anguish.

CHAPTER 3: THE WORLD BENEATH

The vast majority of adults simply don't understand the complex and different world in which adolescents live. In addition, most adults fear or are repulsed by what they see in the adolescent world. Teens live in a world largely unknown to adults.

A World Beneath

Midadolescents have responded to systemic abandonment by creating a separate social system that I call the *world beneath*. It is a sophisticated society that is reserved just for them, with its own rules and moral code, and not meant to be seen by adult society. The foundational reason behind this separate world is that society has abdicated its responsibility to nurture their young into adulthood. Adolescents believe they have no choice but to band together to create a safe place and satisfy their longing to connect with others. The world beneath is concerned with one major feature: relational safety.

In the midst of this driving need to create places of safety, young people can still appear “resilient.” They can appear externally optimistic, feel that they are OK, and that they can take care of themselves. They can even exhibit a callous and indifferent spirit toward the older generation, yet at their core each one is crying out for an adult who cares.

Youth Ministry Book Summaries: Hurt 2.0

A Complex Social Reality

Adolescents must navigate the multiple expectations of teachers, parents, and other adults while maintaining adolescent relationships. These varying contexts of life force midadolescents to live according to multiple selves. This necessity of multiple selves can seem almost schizophrenic to adults with a well-defined sense of self. The defining developmental task of midadolescence is the ability to draw on integrated abstract thought as they bounce from self to self. However, midadolescents are not able to integrate such thinking across the many settings in which they live. This is why they do not see the many contradictions between behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes across the many selves. Adults believe that what they see is the reality and the entire package. For teens, the multiple selves are a pretense and an accommodation to adult society. The world beneath is the reality.

The Outer Shell and the Inner Reality

The most visible mark of the world beneath is the callousness that most adolescents wear when adults try to penetrate their world. Most adults are too intimidated to try and get past the hardness. This is misinterpreted by teens as lack of care and the cycle continues. The toughness is both a defense against further disappointment and a test for adults who get too close. The world beneath exists because young people believe that few adults genuinely care about them. Adults have a long way to go to penetrate the layers of protection. We must dispel the myth that our young are doing fine and repent of our neglect and insensitivity. We must be willing to become students of our teens to understand their world. We must provide boundaries to keep them from making seriously negative choices. Finally, we must provide a community of adults who lovingly surround them with support, and care.

CHAPTER 4: PEERS

“The only people who really know me are my friends” is an almost universal sentiment among adolescents. Teens feel free to be more authentic with their peers than anyone else. Indeed, the least false self-behavior is reported in relationships with close friends.

The New Social Reality: Clusters

In the 1950’s students were primarily interested in becoming part of the circle of “popular students.” Today, high schools are made up of smaller groupings of friends that have come to be known as *clusters*. Members of a cluster may share a similar interest such as music, dress, or experiences, but the defining characteristics are a strong bond of loyalty and a common social narrative that defines who is in the cluster and who is not. Clusters have replaced cliques in the adolescent social economy.

The Why of Clusters

The driving force behind clustering is the need to find a safe place. Midadolescents gather in like-minded groups to protect themselves from hurt and disappointment of adult society. As parents have gradually pushed their children aside, teens believe their only choice is to find a place where they will not be ignored or used. In short, in a culture of abandonment, the peer group seems to be the only option they have.

Youth Ministry Book Summaries: Hurt 2.0

The What of Clusters

A cluster is a group of adolescents who define themselves as a relational unit. The size generally ranges from four to eight members. Clusters are almost always gender specific, but a male cluster may closely align with a female one. Loyalty, trust, and commitment are the prime virtues. The friends do not reveal confidences or break promises. The cluster has certain rules and values that bind the group together, and the members tend to subordinate their own personal convictions to the will of the group.

The How of Clusters

While much evidence has shown that adolescents choose clusters who are similar to themselves, my observations revealed that cluster formation is less about behaviors and activities and more about a sense of comfort and safety. Clusters are about who will make one feel the most welcome and safe with the least amount of work and stress. Finding the path of least resistance is an important factor in determining friendship clusters. There may be overlap or movement between clusters, but this is the exception rather than the rule.

The “So What” of Clusters

Clusters function as independent units which also determine the view of other clusters, who one hangs out with, talks to in the hall, or attends events with. All parties generally understand who they will and will not get involved with. Such social stratification makes a true “student community” on most campuses an impossibility. Adults who care for young people will do well to understand how they organize themselves and honor what is important to them. Find ways to invest in the other members of a cluster. In church groups teens are often thrown together in false relationships in the name of “fellowship” by adults who think kids connect to one another just like they used to. Finally, clusters tend to not be all they are advertised to be. Teens still describe themselves as lonely. Adults should seek to simply be there for the younger generation, providing the safe place that they long for.

CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL

Usually, the public high school experience is portrayed as the most glamorous and exciting time of one’s life. But today’s school experience bears little resemblance to that of generations past and may, in fact, be promoting anxiety and hostility.

View of the Teachers

Most teachers that I observed and spoke to are overwhelmed by the demands of their job, fed up with criticism they receive from parents and others, and discouraged by the number of students that simply do not care. Many respond by withdrawing emotionally, a stance that is immediately picked up on by students who are desiring caring and authenticity.

Many teachers expect students to be motivated by the joy of learning. This is no longer the case and immediately puts a wedge between student and teacher. The most effective teachers have a passion for both the subject matter and the students. Teachers are often quick to label students as “good” or “bad” and tend to give extra effort to the good kids while being dismissive of the others. For many the

Youth Ministry Book Summaries: Hurt 2.0

litmus test of a “good” student is the respect they show. However, in today’s world, respect from students is no longer an automatic. It is a hard-earned benefit to be won. Most teachers also feel disrespected by both parents and administration. The lack of positive parental involvement is a persistent problem. A teacher rarely knows anything about students’ family systems, friends, or internal struggles. This often results in snap judgments and labeling that last for the year.

View of Students

Four trends emerged concerning the viewpoint of students. *First*, students believe that respect is something that is earned, not granted due to position. Students believe that teachers must earn respect by showing respect and caring first. *Second*, the days of students finding learning a pleasurable experience are gone. The main motivation appears to be surviving midadolescence with as much self-interest and self-protection as is necessary. The majority of students have very nebulous goals concerning the future and just want school to “get them somewhere.” *Third*, cheating is so widespread in high school that it is considered the norm. Students will simply do whatever they feel is necessary to meet the expectations of teachers and parents. They rarely considered cheating a moral problem, and accepted deceit to protect, defend, or push oneself forward. *Last*, for students who care about grades, there is ever-increasing anxiety over school. The pressure to compete with others, get into college, the need to be involved in as many activities as possible, and the increasing amount of homework have left students, exhausted, harried, and frazzled.

Most students feel anonymous and powerless in school. They aren’t being nurtured and assimilated into the adult world by caring mentors. Most are learning how to “beat the system” by playing to the expectations of the establishment. The most important thing an adult can do is simply care for each person in front of them and let them know that they matter. Each student has potential and deserves a deliberate, nurturing school environment.

CHAPTER 6: FAMILY

There is a growing trend of parents placing their own needs ahead of their children. While there are many solid, supportive parents, the brokenness in today’s families is far more pervasive and destructive than I realized.

The Definition and Meaning of Family

The concept of the family has changed, and this shift is perhaps the most significant form of cultural abandonment that midadolescents have endured. Overwhelming evidence shows that the most important place of safety for a young person is a dual-parent setting where they are unconditionally loved and accepted. Yet, there is no longer a standard definition of *family*. It simply means what one wants it to mean and allows for the justification of whatever situation adults find themselves in. The family system can change at the whim of adults, causing significant consequences to the psyches, relationships, worldviews, and overall lives of teens.

Family/Parental Behaviors That Affect Adolescents

Parents seem to be fragmented. The time they need to keep their lives in order affects their ability to

Youth Ministry Book Summaries: Hurt 2.0

be there for their children. Many parents are healthy and involved, but I encountered many more that were stressed-out and uninvolved. Many teens expressed that their parents don't make much of a difference in their lives. This resulted in everything from disappointment to a deep sense of hurt and betrayal in teens. Many adolescents are operating as if they are on their own.

A second observation involves the amount and intensity of conflict between parents and teens. For the majority, it is a daily concern. What matters most to teens is how parents deal with conflict. For many parents conflicts drive a wedge in their relationship. Teens quickly pick up on this separation and they respond by pulling away from their parents. Technologies such as cell phones and the internet have made shutting out parents easier than ever. Most teens feel they have no choice but to distance themselves from the emotional entanglement. This conflict is further evidence to them of parental abandonment. Parents have a tremendous responsibility to not be emotionally entrapped by parent-teen conflict. Teens almost universally express a desire for more time and a closer relationship with parents, but equally express hesitancy because of the turmoil involved.

Conclusion

Parents must commit to two important strategies: understanding their teen and their world and providing them with secure boundaries while allowing them room to grow. Parents must provide a safe, nurturing environment while simultaneously maintaining appropriate authority and control. The most important thing a parent can do is build a relationship in which their child trusts them.

CHAPTER 7: SPORTS

Sports are no longer about fun, exercise, and play. They are about competition, winning, and defeating an opponent. Coaches and parents have added a layer of performance anxiety to teens' love of sport.

The Pros and Cons of High School Athletics

The positive aspects of high school sports have been documented for years: health benefits, release of physical energy, making friends, confidence, teamwork, building character and self-discipline, self-esteem. But few of the teens I encountered participate in sports because they make friends, get exercise, etc. For most, the level of expectation and pressure to perform make sports an all-consuming commitment. The pressure to compete and excel is often intense from demanding coaches who talk of "what's best for the students" but are really committed to what's best for the team.

Most sports offer the opportunity to play year round with club teams. This has resulted in a drastic increase in overuse injuries. In addition, sports at all levels has become "big business" (as seen by the Little League World Series). When enjoyment is replaced by "win at all costs," it's no longer sport. We've been reared to believe that youth sports build character, but in light of the advancement of the best at the expense of the weak and the pressure of parents who live vicariously through their young, little character is being built. What we've taught our children is a self-centered performance ethic that is destructive to healthy development.

Youth Ministry Book Summaries: Hurt 2.0

The Dethroning of the Esteemed Athlete

Another interesting discovery that I observed is that jocks no longer occupy the highest rung on the status ladder. The social ladder of popularity is being replaced by a web of social influence. While athletics still mean a great deal, they're no more important than any other group, including the band. Students no longer put up with the stereotype that athletes rule the school. Many students disdain jocks. Even the top stars feel pangs of loneliness and insecurity as a result of their worth being measured by their last performance on the field/court.

Conclusion

How do we fight our competitive instincts and make sports fun? How do we remove our adult need to live our lives through our kids? How do we change the system so that even high school sports is about play? During this study I became convinced of how insidious and self-serving high school sports have become. They are no longer for or about the students; they are about the adults in charge. Of course there are exceptions to this, but even "good" coaches are under the ethos of a competitive system that is taking its toll on our young. I can't think of any other area of life in which we as a society have abandoned our young more thoroughly. The most potent tool we have is to help adolescents see that competition doesn't matter. We've given lip service to this for decades. It's time to live it.

CHAPTER 8: SEX

We live in a sexually saturated culture. In particular, teens are the direct targets of our society's fixation on a sexuality with no rules or boundaries. By the time a young person is ten years old, he or she has heard about or seen on TV and in movies, not only sexual intercourse but also oral sex, multiple partners, masturbation, anal sex, and any other form of experimentation that humans can invent. It has been decades since the "innocent" have been shielded from these behaviors. It seems that there is no place to hide from the pervasiveness of this message.

As a result of this study I became aware that the adolescent world is not as saturated with sex as it is infused with palpable loneliness. For most teens, sex has become commonplace and lost its mystique. They have been tainted by overexposure and conditioned to expect so much from sex, only to realize that it is a temporary salve for the pain and loneliness resulting from abandonment. It's my observation that the central reason for the decreasing age of sexual activity is loneliness. It has more to do with a desire for relational connection and a safe place than a pleasurable physical act. As products of lifelong systemic abandonment, they are crying out for attention and affection.

Sexual Behavior and Attitudes

How sex is defined by teenagers has changed through the decades. Almost no midadolescent believes that sex is anything other than actual intercourse. Oral sex and mutual masturbation have gone mainstream and have given rise to the term "technical virginity" to describe someone who has experienced every form of sexual activity except actual intercourse. The general mindset is "What's the big deal? Everybody does it." I met dozens of self-proclaimed virgins who regularly practiced many forms of sexual activity with multiple partners without guilt. Some even touted their "staying pure" until mar-

Youth Ministry Book Summaries: Hurt 2.0

riage. Due in part to the media, teens have been acculturated to the view that sex is enjoyable and appropriate regardless of the intimacy or longevity of a relationship. There is a genuine belief among midadolescents that sex with a relative stranger can bring happiness and fulfillment. When half of teenaged girls report having had sexual intercourse, and more than one quarter having “at least” one sexually transmitted disease, we’re in the middle of a sexual crisis that can’t be ignored.

An aspect of adolescent sexuality that is rarely discussed in academic settings is the emotional and relational outcomes of an over-sexualized world. I heard story after story of betrayal, misunderstanding, regret, and self-hatred resulting from sexual activity. I saw countless teens develop callous indifference to the pain they experienced from uncommitted sexual relationships. It’s impossible to separate the mind from the heart, or the body from either. Teens do not have the experience, resources, or capacity to cope with this wide range of complexities.

Conclusion

Because of the sexual nature of our culture, I can’t help but lament the fact that we have lost any hope of maintaining sexual innocence for this generation. The hope I carry is that the pendulum has swung as far as it can go in thinking about sex as a toy. Perhaps generations that have seen how devastatingly empty the world can be will bring our experience back to center. For now we must tell our young that love matters, that people are not objects or playthings, and that our bodies and hearts can’t be separated. There is a difference between disconnected sexuality and healthy love where sex is an expression of authentic and lasting intimacy with someone we can trust.

CHAPTER 9: BUSYNESS AND STRESS

Adolescents today are both busy and tired. They are the victims of overwhelming stress resulting from bewildering social change and constantly rising adult expectations. They average five to six hours of sleep a night, and live under the expectations of coaches, teachers and other activity leaders. The increase in homework and the accessibility of many communication options make their daily life a balancing act.

Stress is a core aspect of midadolescent life, yet they don’t even know how stressed they are. They have no other framework. It’s the only reality they know. And they are turned off by anyone’s attempts to put limits on them or suggest priorities or boundaries. The stress is real and powerful, yet few teens see it as a negative aspect of their lives.

The Reality of Their Lives

The lack of time to get everything done is a commonly mentioned problem among adolescents. For many this is combined with a desire to have a full resume because they know the system rewards those who exert themselves, and admittance to the college of their choice may depend on it. Studies have shown that those who place high value on success and prestige are at higher risk for emotional distress.

The Sources of Stress

Youth Ministry Book Summaries: Hurt 2.0

Stress is often defined as extraordinary demands for adaptation. For teens it comes from many directions: family, school, jobs, sports. Teens have the added burdens of abandonment, social fragmentation, and being forced to live multiple selves that make them prone to more stress. In my study, I observed three areas of stress that took the most toll on students:

Pressure to succeed. Both the classroom and the athletic field produce a “never quite good enough” feeling that teens can’t escape. This pressure to perform is mainly about how others will perceive them, whether they are worthy of attention and affection.

Family pressure. Students regularly feel that their greatest struggle is the stress in the relationship with their parents. They are easily discouraged when there is unresolved conflict at home.

Pressure from relationships. The most easily disguised source of stress for teens is the pressure to keep people happy. They desperately want everyone to like them and they worry most about disappointing others.

The Impact of Stress

As adults continue to pile increased demands on teens, they experience a “need to flee.” The issue of stress may be the deciding factor in the creation of “the world beneath.” The ordinary effects of stress—headaches, insomnia, inability to concentrate—are difficult enough to bear. But teens increasingly struggle with more serious problems—eating disorders, substance abuse, self-injury, and suicide in an effort to cope with stress. There is a disturbing rise in cutting, burning, hitting of self among teens as they attempt to release emotional pressure. Adolescents face more stress than in the past but possess fewer coping mechanisms. Adults must train young people how to handle the stress of life.

Conclusion

The most significant impression I had was the sense of loneliness and isolation that betrays the confidence with which teens present themselves. Their busyness keeps them from having to face and reflect on their emotional state. The resulting stress only serves to increase the desperation they feel. They long for safety and security, but the sense of abandonment they feel produces a defense mechanism that keeps them running as fast as they can.

CHAPTER 10: ETHICS AND MORALITY

If there is one area of adolescence that is changing rapidly, it is ethics and morality. Seeing themselves as abandoned, teens have a driving need to create a world that makes life safer and easier. Much of their moral thinking is filtered through the lens of self-interest and self-protection. It’s OK to do what you want as long as it serves a personal need. They have grown up in a world in which adults say one thing and do another, and young people have adopted this behavioral inconsistency and defensive relativism. While loyalty to friends and staying within predetermined boundaries of social life remain guiding principles, cheating, lying, and stealing have increased at an alarming rate among teens. While these are not the only areas in which teens struggle, they do represent a sustained, even daily rejection of the ethical definitions of the adults who raised and trained them.

Youth Ministry Book Summaries: Hurt 2.0

Moral Categories

Researchers often identify three levels of motivation in making moral choices. Level one is concerned with the needs of self; Level two is driven by “how others might respond to my choices”; Level three is guided by internal principals. I observed a regression of moral development in the teen years. Rather than continuing to progress, they bounce back and forth between satisfying their own needs and seeking approval from others. Because they are in a mode of self-protection, their survivalist mentality keeps them from progressing to higher levels of moral development based on internal principles.

Lying

“If it doesn’t hurt anyone, or it is necessary for any reason, than a lie isn’t wrong.” This was an almost universal response among the teens I interviewed. Lying is a natural, daily reflex for teens, especially to parents or pastors because “They can’t be trusted with anything.” Nearly every student admitted to lying regularly, without remorse. Yet these same students believed they were highly moral: “Sure I lie. Everybody does. But I’m an honest person and that’s what counts.”

The most common defense given for lying was the need to protect oneself or one’s friends, to avoid being punished. Lying is the easiest route to self-protection. “I just can’t trust anybody so I need to protect myself” was a common rationale. Ironically, those who felt that lying was not wrong felt that it *was wrong* if they were the one being lied to. Most were not bothered by this inconsistency.

Cheating

Cheating has become an epidemic among high school students. It is considered a normal, acceptable, daily activity. It’s rarely seen as a violation of some moral code, but is viewed as a pragmatic and necessary means of advancing or protecting oneself. Students particularly justify cheating in response to a teacher who is incompetent or disrespectful. “It’s only wrong if you get caught or someone gets hurt” is the almost universal standard. With the ease of access to online resources, plagiarism is a particular form of cheating that threatens the ethical standard of high schools and colleges.

Conclusion

Lying, cheating, and stealing are the new social reality among teens. Adults need to present the young with societal values that match our own behavior. A key will be a coherency of the messages that are given from parents, teachers, police, church, peers, etc. We need to be involved, engage the moral systems of teens, commit to training the young properly, and commit to personal integrity.

CHAPTER 11: PARTYING, GAMING, AND SOCIAL NETWORKING

“Everybody I know drinks and drinks a lot.” This sentiment was expressed by students from nearly every social category: the partier, an athlete, a girl in the school chorale, a religious girl, and a quiet boy who tended to stay to himself. I began to wonder if drinking was more widespread than I had assumed.

The Partying Community

Youth Ministry Book Summaries: Hurt 2.0

Nearly all midadolescents want to party and are going to party regardless of what parents say. It has been ingrained in the narrative of the population and it goes with the territory of being a teen in this culture. Unfortunately, the party scene isn't about the party. It's about drinking and, to a certain degree, drug use, sexual play, and other risky behaviors. Far too many students believe that it is impossible to have a good time at a party without alcohol.

As I listened to stories surrounding the party world, I noticed that the experiences of the partiers made the parties memorable, not the alcohol. Parties were social gatherings that allowed for celebration and fulfilled teens' longing for community. They became a symbol of the ritual of adolescent celebration and therefore an act of initiation. In short, partying is a means by which abandoned young people attempt to satisfy their need for community. The lubricant of alcohol coupled with the prospect of sexual opportunity provide a temporary relief from their loneliness.

Social Networking and Technology: The New teen Hangout

The average teenager receives over two thousand texts per month, with many sending hundreds per day. Texting presents the opportunity to stay connected to one's peer group every hour of the day (and often in the middle of the night). Social networking websites present another avenue to observe the adolescent drive for community. While disclosing personal information online presents a significant risk, it is the currency of intimacy among teens. For young people left starving for belonging because of abandonment, the potential risks are negligible compared to the perceived benefits.

A third area where teens use technology to meet relational needs is "gaming." The allure of online gaming has shifted from an outlet for competition to a place to experience intimate community and group purpose. The virtual world allows them to express themselves in ways they might not feel comfortable elsewhere, while offering a place to experience teamwork, encouragement, and fun.

Conclusion

Adolescents are hungry for experiences that provide meaning, hope, adventure, and celebration. As adults, our collective abandonment has taught them that there is no celebration unless we falsely create one by altering the state of our lives. Just look at the barrage of media images and adult behavior to understand why they believe alcohol is necessary to experience community. Yet, the quickest way to cause teens to dive deeper into the world beneath is to curtly disparage what they see as an important ritual. They are screaming loudly that they cannot survive without a safe, welcoming place.

CHAPTER 12: KIDS AT THE MARGINS

While this generation is marked by abandonment and isolation, there are adolescents who fall outside the mainstream in their behaviors, attitudes, and values. I call these "kids at the margins" and there are two main types: the *vulnerable*, who have fewer opportunities and resources, and the *privileged*, who have more. The former may be disadvantaged because of poverty, homelessness, racial oppression, disability, sexual orientation, or because they are part of a separatist subculture or are highly religious. The latter are advantaged because they enjoy more social capital, environmental resources,

Youth Ministry Book Summaries: Hurt 2.0

and relational and vocational opportunities. Let's look at how these "kids at the margins" handle the three tasks of adolescence: *identity* (developing a healthy sense of self), *autonomy* (feeling empowered; the ability to make a difference), and *belonging* (to be an accepted and important part of a community).

Vulnerable Kids

Identity. Identity is shaped by the interaction of external messages we receive and our internal conception of ourselves. Vulnerable kids often receive negative and destructive messages. They can be labeled a failure, that they will never amount to anything. Vulnerable kids are particularly susceptible to an environment of violence, and may define themselves as violent. Many turn to high-risk behaviors in their search for security and stability.

Autonomy. Many vulnerable kids face overwhelming systemic forces that deny power not only to them, but to their entire community. In communities where oppression and depression have existed for decades, if the adults model a sense of hopelessness and resignation, it is difficult for teens to rise above the only life they have ever known. This sense of powerlessness and lack of adult support is communicated through a general sense of "Adults don't trust us" and "Grown-ups run everything."

Belonging. While vulnerable kids tend to have a stronger sense of community within their family structure, the world has generally rejected them. This is seen no more clearly than in the vast differences in educational opportunities between privileged and disadvantaged kids. While we are trained to believe that we are all the same regardless of race or class, this is simply not the case experientially. Vulnerable teens generally believe that the mainstream elite are committed to maintaining walls of exclusion while perpetuating the myth that we are one.

Privileged Kids

Identity. The pathway to identity for privileged kids becomes more complicated as their environment is more controlled and manipulated. They know that they are being watched and evaluated by externals, namely by how they look and perform. Because privileged kids are trained to see themselves as elite, they are under far greater pressure to live up to external expectations, while having to avoid showing any weakness. The pressures of performance and defining oneself by material possessions can stifle the natural development of identity formation.

Autonomy. Much research supports the idea that young people with the most support, belief in themselves, and academic achievement have a greater ability to thrive in the face of the difficulties of adolescence. While most adults believe that kids who have more opportunities and resources are more happy and satisfied, recent research is challenging that myth. Teenagers in affluent communities have higher rates of depression, eating disorders, substance abuse, anxiety, cutting, and other self-destructive behaviors than all other groups of teenagers (including high-risk or "vulnerable" teens). They display a disturbing lack of independence and fragility in the face of adversity. Controlling parents who have an alternate agenda for their teen, or parents who are simply not present, can have a crippling effect on a young person's sense of empowerment.

Belonging. When adolescents grow up believing that personal achievement and individual success are

Youth Ministry Book Summaries: Hurt 2.0

what matter, belonging can be seen as an optional luxury. If life is viewed as one competition after another, isolation results. Many privileged kids struggle with a deep sense of loneliness. They grow up wondering, “Does anyone actually care for me, or am I only valuable for what I do? Do others see and treat me as I have been trained to see and treat them?”

Conclusion

Marginalized kids need what every other young person needs: adults who care for them without self-serving agendas. They are desperate for a society that will help them discover who they are, what gifts and voice they have, and how they belong in a community that values everyone. Unfortunately, teens are too often programmed to believe that no one is there for them, that they simply do not belong to anyone else.

CHAPTER 13: WHAT DO ADOLESCENTS NEED?

So what do we do about the abandonment of youth and the world beneath? Many respond by saying the problem of caring for kids is just too overwhelming and give up. This isn't an option. Students need adults who are there for them with relational care and concern. The only qualification an adult needs is the willingness and courage to authentically care. Here are three specific teen needs:

Youth need refocused, nurturing organizations and programs. At one time adults knew their responsibility to nurture and protect the young, and they started activities and programs to organize communal nurture of the young. This is all but lost as many programs now exist to serve the agendas of adult organizers. Youth everywhere need a community of people, organizations and institutions that have their individual needs and interests in mind.

Youth need a stable and secure loving presence. If teens seem callous, without a need for adults, this is a smokescreen. It is how they cope with the danger of abandonment from those they have trusted. They are desperate for the safe presence of a caring adult, whether they know it or not.

Youth need authentic, intimate relationships with adults. Every teen needs to know at least one adult who knows him or her well and will do whatever it takes to bring them to healthy adulthood. Even the best parents can't hope to meet all of the nurturing requirements of raising a postmodern adolescent. Nor can teachers. We need to encourage a wide variety of adults to take part in the lives of the young. The most fundamental need of the abandoned generation is an adult who sincerely cares.

CHAPTER 14: FIVE STRATEGIES TO TURN THE TIDE OF ABANDONMENT

Those who work with youth should be trained in the changing youth culture. The prevailing view among adults is still “adolescence is the same as it ever was.” Everyone who works with teens directly need to be trained in how different things are today for teens. At the least this includes educators, counselors, coaches, social service agencies, and religious youth workers. Classes or seminars can be used to present the issues surrounding systemic abandonment.

Youth Ministry Book Summaries: Hurt 2.0

Those who serve adolescents must work together. No one adult or organization can turn the tide of abandonment alone. Programs with similar goals must work together. We must overcome the constraints of time and trust out of a commitment to nurture the young of our communities.

Those who serve adolescents must understand youth and provide boundaries. The greatest hurdle is convincing adults that abandonment has taken its toll on today's young. Adults need to understand their changing world, the struggles they face, and provide boundaries so that the choices they make have as few serious consequences as possible. Providing boundaries is the responsibility of every caring adult in a given community.

Parents need to be equipped and encouraged. Most parents of teens feel alone and insecure. They see the relational disconnectedness and how they are pushed side in favor of friends. Parents need to be aware of adolescent development, the reality of lengthened adolescence, the reality of multiple selves and the world beneath, and the perception by teens that they are on their own. If parents are aware of these aspects, they will be on their way to confident parenting.

Communities must make sure that each student has a few adults who know and care for him or her. It is time for the myth of the single role model to end. No individual has the ability to be present in the variety of ways that an adolescent needs. Research has consistently shown that several positive and supportive adults that offer the same message must be present to have an effect on the life of a child. Every adult must add to the cumulative message of protection, nurture, and affection. This is by far the best way to counteract the effects of systemic abandonment.

CORNER

CROZ'S

If I were going to the International Space Station and could only take three youth ministry books with me, this would be one of them. It's that good, that important. It's the most eye-opening account of understanding contemporary teens that you'll come across. But it definitely challenges many of our preconceived notions of what we *think* we know about teens. That's really Chap's main point—most adults don't know what's happening in *the world beneath* and the truth is bleaker than we ever could have imagined. Every chapter just blew me away and saddened me: lying, cheating, sexual activity, etc.

I think every adult needs to do some honest soul searching and think about how we've contributed to this systemic abandonment of teens. I didn't have to look beyond my own household. Then perhaps you'd be willing to repent as appropriate. Then we need to band together and strategize how we can intentionally and lovingly re-enter teens' lives in a way that earns their trust and begins to heal their souls.

The overarching thought I had as I read *Hurt 2.0* is that in order to reverse this sense of abandonment in our young, youth ministry needs to transition from a "youth group" model to a mentoring model. Long-term, committed, intentional relationships with young people has to be the answer. I know, I know. Pretty radical idea.