

“The Seven Cries of Today’s Teens”

By Jim Burns, Ph.D.



Remember when you were a teenager . . . and all you really thought you wanted was a couple of good friends, no hassles at school – and for your parents to just leave you alone?

Of course, if you’re a Baby Boomer, chances are your teenage years were anything but that simple. So now that you’re the parent of a teenager or two, it may have crossed your mind that your kids are now going through the same kind of chaos you experienced, right?

Well, I’ve got news for you. We may have been 13, 16 and 18 years old at one point in our lives, but we were *never* our kids’ age!

Now, I realize you’ve probably heard me use that expression a lot in my writings and seminars, but there’s a good reason for that – simply put, it’s true! Let’s look at the reasons why with an assist from my good friend, author and family expert Tim Smith.

In addition to being the President of LIFESKILLS FOR AMERICAN FAMILIES, Tim has also done extensive research with the George H. Gallup International Institute. One recent study centered on what it’s like to be a teenager in American in the 21st Century. What he found was really quite remarkable.

First, some background information. Youth in America over the past 60 years have been categorized as either 1) “Baby Boomers” (born between 1946 and 1964); or 2) Generation “X” (or “Gen-X-ers”) born between 1965 and 1981). Well, now, prepare to meet the “Millennials!”

“Millennial” is actually a term Gallup uses to describe any child born since 1982 . . . which means today’s teens all fit into that group. On the surface, they tend to favor body piercing and tatoos . . . but deep inside, they’re actually rather conservative, shying away

from cultural norms like drug usage and premarital sex. They're more likely to hold to conservative political views as well . . . which may explain the recent resurgence in the popularity of "classic rock" on the radio.

Six years of Gallup youth surveys have identified ten recurring needs. These ten needs were then put to a fresh sample of teens to measure the relative strength of these needs in the minds of survey respondents.

Three of the items included in the new survey received mild interest from the respondents – but the seven that filled out the top of the list received overwhelming response.

So, in order of frequency of mention on the survey, here are **The Top 7 Cries of Today's Teens:**

1. **The need to be trusted.** Teens believe that their elders distrust them and regard them as irresponsible and unpredictable. Teens today want to be taken seriously – and we, as their parents, would be wise to create an environment at home that allows them to earn that trust.
2. **The need to be understood and loved.** Please note that the teens who responded to the survey did *not* asked to be "fixed and made whole." I believe they know their lives are in heavy transition at this point. But the data from the research is clear that teens tend to believe that their elders do not understand them. Teens crave to be listened to and loved . . . preferably by parents or guardians. (And if they don't get this need met by you, Mom and Dad, they'll go somewhere else!)
3. **The need to feel safe and secure.** Say what? Wild, reckless, self-confident teenagers who know no fear need to feel safe? That's right. They need to know their home is secure and their school is safe. Sadly these days such is not always the case.
4. **The need to believe that life is meaningful and has a purpose.** Studies show that this is a growing need in the populace as a whole . . . more than likely because the "Gen X" philosophy that postmodernism rules is on the wane. Society in general is realizing that there *are* moral absolutes – and I'm convinced that Millennials can be the transitional generation for bringing spiritual revival to the world!
5. **The need to be listened to – to be heard.** Though this might sound like #2, there's a huge difference between feeling "understood" and "listened to." The latter takes time, and the breathless pace we lead our lives doesn't make that possible.
6. **The need to be appreciated and valued.** A poor self-image is a key factor in anti-social behavior . . . just ask the residents of Columbine and Paducah. Roughly one-third of all respondents to the Gallup survey indicated they felt worthless and unappreciated.
7. **The need to be supported in their efforts.** This means anything from helping with homework to showing up at Little League or soccer games. It's one thing to get your kids involved in a lot of activities; the real benefit to your children, however, is when Mom and Dad also participate.

By and large, teens remain eternally optimistic, particularly about their personal futures. At the same time, however, they are apprehensive about the future of society as they face a host of problems that simply were not on the scene just a few decades ago.

They need you, Mom and Dad, to stand in the gap with them. They have a heavy load to bear. But, with God's help, you can make a difference in their lives. After all . . . you're not just raising them to be good kids – you're training them to become responsible adults!

(Excerpted from the book, [The Seven Cries of Today's Teens: Hear Their Hearts, Make the Connection](#) by Tim Smith with commentary by George Gallup, Jr. , adapted by Jim Burns, Ph.D. Click [here](#) for information on how you can receive a copy of this helpful publication. Tim Smith also serves as President of "LIFESKILLS FOR AMERICAN FAMILIES.")