

# CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE

## SUPPORTING THE TOTAL CHILD AND/OR TEEN

**Problem:** With family breakdown at an all time high, at risk issues in young people are climbing to a point out of control. Substance abuse, violence, suicide, pregnancy, and drop-out rates continue to escalate. With institutions crumbling and role models dwindling, there is a hopelessness that permeates our next generation. **Children do not feel safe.**

**Premise:** We are a reaction based culture. We circle the wagons **AFTER** an outbreak only to see it repeat in another time, in another location. Headlines decry youth problems with little or no answers. Blame and finger pointing are common with schools, parents, friends and community as the culprits.

**Theory Solution:** Our only hope is early warning and detection followed by a blueprint system with a step-by-step procedural approach encompassing the four groups affecting a young person's life.

1. friends (peers)
2. family (immediate and extended)
3. teachers, educators, school support staff
4. community at large

There is a tendency to focus on one group and expect a solution. The reality is that one group of the four, with an insensitive approach, can negate any other.

Example: an insensitive parent can offset any gains of a teacher. Simply, we are all affected by our total "circle of influence".

**Reality Solution:** Step-by step.

1. Organize a community town meeting involving representation of every faction. Example: Students, parents, teachers and educators, businesses, church, media, agencies, service clubs, youth groups, administrators, key groups like scouts, old timers groups
2. Select a facilitator
3. Determine by consensus the top three problems facing youth in the community

4. Divide the group into four key areas: a) friends; b) family; c) teachers & educators; d) community.
5. Each group is responsible for developing mission statements for their group, schedule meeting times, increase scope of group size & influence and, most important, be part of the universal action coalition plan.
6. The keys to the success of the coalition are:
  - a) Be current and relevant as problems shift, so must the blueprint be adjusted.
  - b) A youth focus group must be involved at every stage of planning for insight, support and advice as ideas and programs become reality.
  - c) Every person in the coalition should be encouraged to exercise their voice in a safe, structured environment.
  - d) Parents whose children have suffered tragedies should be sensitively encouraged to have key involvement in the overall process.
  - e) Shared neighboring communities should have representation at all combined coalition meetings. Youth are mobile these days and problems are not always self-contained in an isolated geographic setting.
  - f) Realistic appraisal of problems and solutions will insure ongoing participation.
  - g) Programs should have goals based on the SMART acronym: Specific, Manageable, Achievable, Relevant & Time related.
  - h) Finally, realization that problems do not start overnight and will not go away overnight.

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