



pact's

point of view

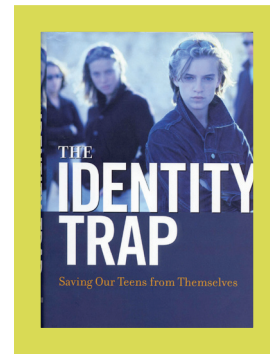
The newsletter for adoptive families with children of color

*First published in Pact's Point of View © 2008
Do not reprint without permission.*

Book Review

The Identity Trap: Saving Our Teens from Themselves By Joseph Nowinski

Reviewed by Marie Claude Provencher



As the mother of three kids very close in age, it is always with great interest and yes, anxiety, that I read any book about adolescence. In *The Identity Trap: Saving Our Teens from Themselves*, author Joseph Nowinski gives parents useful tools on how to relate with our teenagers. Each chapter has easy to read "tip boxes", exercises and FAQs. He explains the identity linked to behaviors such as eating disorder, drug abuses, alienation, combativeness, depression, self-destructive behavior, shyness and self-hatred. He also talks a little about tattooing and body piercing.

Dr. Nowinski focuses on the identities rather than the behaviors that derive from those identities. He argues that parents have to establish communication with their child so that parents can understand the construction of their child's social behavior in school, with friends and peers. For instance, parent should ask how the school social system works and what is the child's nickname. These might give parents important clues about the child's identity. He suggests that teenagers need to see that within their identities lie something new about themselves that they can discover no matter what the identity they chose at that moment. Nowinsky does not believe we should emphasize the reason for the behavior but rather we should focus on the present and future by making sure we do our best to help our child experience success and give positive identity choices. Focusing on the past does not hold the cure to problematic identities. He also reminds us that no one has ever won an argument with a teenager. Something to remember...

The goal here is to help build a resilient identity where optimism, purpose, persistence and challenge are present. Building traditions and more importantly rituals build a teen's resilient identity by showing the values of the family. Rituals and traditions help build parent-child bond, which is more effective than rewards and punishments. It also establishes a sense of place in relation to the family and the community and avoids making the child the center of the family. The last chapter deals with spirituality, which he describes as "how we live" rather than "how religious we are". By establishing a spiritual lifestyle in our family, we are creating a sense of purpose for our families and are allowing from time and space for meaningful communications where parents are not shy to say they are sorry and learn to express gratitude often.

The only negative critic I have is that I wish he used another expression for "dark identities" when he refers to problematic identities. Although many of the clinical examples described in the book deal with what I view as White identity issues (emos, Abercrombies and such) the tips the author offers seem universal to me.

All in all it is a very useful book that I hope to use in future years. He suggests a much healthier plan than the one I had before which was to lock myself in my bedroom, have food delivered to my teenagers and come out of my room when the food delivery starts to slowing down!