Places for Struggling Teens™

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"It is more important to get it right, than to get it first."

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A JUVENILE BOOT CAMP DOES NOT WORK!

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The research and experience are clear: while a wilderness program can help a youth with troubles and be a positive experience, a Juvenile boot camp is usually a negative experience for young people who are rebellious, exercising self-destructive activities or have some disorder that is interfering with their ability to successfully grow up. These are the young people who are usually enrolled in emotional growth or therapeutic boarding schools. It also tends to describe those who become incarcerated in the juvenile system. One very common element all these young people share is that their grasp of the concept of cause and effect is often distorted.

Quality emotional growth and therapeutic boarding schools have removed the punishment mentality on which a juvenile boot camp relies, focusing on natural and logical consequences. Though often tough initially for these kids to accept, this works quite well because that system is geared to gently teach children the concept of cause and effect rather than the juvenile boot camp philosophy of trying to pound it into their heads.

For a juvenile boot camp to work, the young person must be able to understand punishment can be a consequence of some action he/she took. However, if they had this understanding in the first place, they probably wouldn't need residential placement anyway. If they don't grasp how cause and effect works, then to them any consequence or punishment simply is interpreted as an arbitrary "meanness," and the only lesson learned is how to manipulate the system or make plans for revenge.

This is what happens when parents find a "juvenile boot camp" in which to enroll their rebellious child, that is, the child frequently feels arbitrarily punished, resents the experience and has a good chance of turning out more troubled than before.

Parents are continually calling my office looking for a "boot camp" for their child. They seem to be following the thinking of many that "cracking down" on a kid will "teach them a lesson." They also refer to how military boot camp was vital in helping some member of their family grow up. They haven't made the connection that their child would quite possibly have been one of those who endured the trauma of being washed out by military boot camp. They also haven't made the connection that "cracking down" on someone will more likely get resentment and passive compliance - all the wrong lessons.

It just doesn't work that way with these kids. In this newsletter, we have been writing on the dangers of boot camps for years, for example pointing out how wilderness programs are much safer and effective in Juvenile boot camp and Wilderness Program in the year 2001 and similar stories which are to be found sprinkled through the On-Going News section of Breaking News .

I hope some parents will read this and take heed. I don't know how to state it more clearly: **JUVENILE BOOT CAMPS DON'T WORK**.

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> Keep away from small people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great
>
> ~ Mark Twain

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