



What Are Today’s Young People “Really” Like? A Workshop for Older Adults

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Audience: A group of older adults – Can be members of a senior center, retirement community, assisted living facilities, senior club or other program or facility serving older adults.

Presenter: Cooperative Extension Agent or other professional who works with older adult groups/ organizations.

Description:

Part I – Statements about Teenagers: True or False?

Instructions: After reading each of the following statements, ask workshop participants to state whether they think the statement is true or false. Provide the correct answer and a brief explanation why.

- (1) — Teenagers are uniquely violent and crime-prone. [Answer: False. In terms of crime volume, youths and adults contribute roughly equal rates for their respective populations.]
- (2) — Teenagers are the most at-risk group for HIV infection and AIDS. [Answer: False. Teens rank third by age group when HIV infection was acquired. When teens are infected with HIV, it is usually transmitted from adult partners or exploiters.]
- (3) — Teenagers are high risk for suicide. [Answer: False. Teens are very low risk for suicide. Suicide rates for high school-age youths are half those of adults.]
- (4) — Teenagers are the most at-risk group of drug abusers. [Answer: False. Teenagers as a whole are one of the groups least likely to abuse drugs, though in recent years we see a slight increase in self-reported, occasional marijuana use by adolescents. Very few teens use harder drugs or indulge frequently.]
- (5) — Teenagers smoke because of immaturity, peer pressure and tobacco ads. [Answer: False. Other factors besides young age contribute to the decision to smoke. For example, youth with parents who smoke are three times as likely to smoke than others.]

Discussion: All of these statements are false. They are “myths.” American teenagers get a bad “rap” in the media. They are often portrayed as violent, reckless in their sexuality, out of control, and devoid of positive values. These portrayals reflect negative stereotypes. (Stereotypes are generalizations made about individuals on the basis of their membership in a particular group.) They convey inaccuracies and can contribute to serious misunderstandings.

Can you think of instances in which older adults are ever the targets of negative stereotypes? By becoming aware of stereotypes that people place on us, as well as those we place on others, we are laying the foundations for personal growth and fuller, richer relationships with others.

Part 2: What do young people like to do for fun?

Instructions: To introduce a discussion about what young people do for fun, ask workshop participants if they know about the following items:

- Pokémon
- Finger bikes
- Fruit By the Foot
- Game Boy
- Body Glitter

[If possible before your presentation, try to pick up a few of these (and other) popular young people's items at a local toy store (or borrow them from one of your young relatives). These items make for great "show and tell" props. You could also ask the seniors to guess what they are. If it suits your personality, you could joke around with the seniors a bit about who is "with it" or not.]

Answers:

Pokémon: Pokémon began as a top-rated cartoon series that captivated half of the children in Japan. Thousands of miles away, American children have joined the Pokémon craze; it has become the number one children's program in America. The Pokémon frenzy is fueled with comics, trading cards, games, and movies. It is not uncommon to see children intensely exchanging stories and goods related to the 250 different creatures in the Pokémon universe.

Finger Bikes: These are tiny bikes that stand less than 3 inches tall. They come with replacement parts, including die-cast frames, functional front and back brakes, a working rubber "chain," and operational crank. Many children spend hours putting the bikes together in different ways and going out on fingertip "test-drives." As with life-sized BMX bikes, all sorts of maneuvers are possible.

Fruit by the Foot: This refers to snacks consisting of processed fruit (with other ingredients) which is spread onto sheets of plastic and rolled up. "Fruit by the Foot" and "Fruit Roll-Ups" are registered trademarks of General Mills, Inc.

Gameboy: A popular hand-held video game developed by Nintendo in 1989. This product signaled a proliferation of mini-video games on hand-held computers and cell phones.

Body Glitter: A growing number of young people are using "glitter" and "glitter gel" to adorn their bodies and hair. The diameter of the containers are about 1 inch, and a little glitter goes a long way in terms of providing added sparkle and shine.

Part 3 – Open discussion about things that young people and older adults can do together

If necessary, provide a few prompts in terms of examples of how young people and older adults can enjoy shared activities involving: food, songs, dance, reading, crafts, etc. To stimulate thinking and discussion about intergenerational dance activities, for example, would be to ask a series of questions:

- What kinds of dances have you enjoyed in your lifetime?
- What made (makes) these dances fun for you?
- Why might young people have fun learning these dances today?
- What would make it fun for you to share these dances with interested young people?

Note: The information from Part I was derived from the book, "The Scapegoat Generation: America's War on Adolescents," written in 1996 by Mike Males.