

Chapter 11

Spirituality



Spirituality, whether within or without of religion, is the most central baring in an adolescent's life. It cannot be ignored by parents or the adolescent will go 'shopping' for meaning, communion, and transcendence.

-Dr. Lisa Miller

“Adolescents who claim to have a personal relationship with the Divine are only half as likely to become alcoholics or drug addicts, or for that matter even to try contraband drugs (marijuana and cocaine),” according to Dr. Lisa Miller. Dr. Miller’s comments were based on a recent study that she and her colleagues conducted at Columbia University with 676 adolescents age 15 to 19. The study showed that teens with a higher degree of personal devotion, personal conservatism, and institutional conservatism were less likely to engage in alcohol consumption and less likely to engage in marijuana or cocaine use.

This was the first study to show that personal spirituality strongly protects against ever developing alcoholism or drug abuse. Previous studies had indicated that being spiritual or religious may help persons recovering from substance abuse overcome their addictions later in life, but this new study suggests that adolescents are much less likely to ever develop those problems if they have a spiritual foundation when they are young.

The findings show that a personal sense of spirituality helps adolescents avoid alcohol and other drugs use and abuse. Adolescents in this study were shown not to be helped by a rigid or forced adherence to religion. In other words, religion forced upon adolescents by their parents or others had little effect, but if the teens in this study had made a personal choice to pursue a spiritual life, they were much less likely to consume alcohol and other drugs.

Because spirituality is such a personal matter that can be practiced in any number of ways, there's little more I want to say to you about this topic. What I do want to stress to you is that the practice of spirituality by your child, *when a personal choice of your child*, can be a potent preventative factor.

So think about the following questions. Include your child in your deliberation and discussions.

Bridge Builder's Exercise

- 1) What role does spirituality play in your life?
- 2) What role does spirituality play in your child's life?
- 3) How can you encourage your child to expand and deepen the role that spirituality plays in their life?
- 4) What resources are available in your community for your child to deepen their involvement in their spiritual practice?
- 5) How can you cultivate your child's exploration of spirituality?
- 6) How can you nurture your child's exploration of spirituality?
- 7) How can you support your child's expression of spirituality?