

TEN MOST COMMON MISTAKES PARENTS MAKE

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"Listed below are ten of the most common mistakes I have seen parents make during my sixteen years working with parents of struggling teens." By Lon Woodbury

1.) **"We want a place close to home."** Restricting one's search to a limited geographical area increases the chances of excluding the most appropriate places that have the best chances for being successful with your child. In effect, this is settling for second best, which increases the chances of a placement not working.

2.) **"We want something affordable." The most expensive residential school or program is the one that doesn't work.** A quality school or program is going to be expensive, whether the parent or the taxpayers pay the bill. Most low cost schools or programs are inexpensive because they cut corners financially, have a poorly thought out program, hire too few people and or hire minimum wage staff.

It is very risky to entrust your child to one of these places. Most parents that enroll a child in a quality Emotional Growth or Therapeutic school or program do so by making the personal sacrifice of dipping into the assets they have accumulated over the years or do as I did, take out a substantial loan or second mortgage.

3.) **"We want our teen fixed."** The teen might have a problem, but the teen is not necessarily THE problem. Blaming the child is an unfair oversimplification. Sometimes the teen just needs to learn the basic lessons and attitudes necessary for growing up, which is the focus of an Emotional Growth school. Or, perhaps the teen has some kind of pathology that is more appropriately the focus of a treatment center. In either case, family relationships are an integral part of both the problem and the solution. Selecting a school or a program that is only concerned with what the child is doing while ignoring the family, is not addressing the whole problem and is less likely to provide a satisfying solution.

4.) **"That school helped our friend's child."** A friend's suggestion is only good for obtaining ideas about successful places to check out. Odds are that the needs of your child are considerably different than the needs of your friend's child, even if the behavior is similar. There is no one best place for struggling teens; some are simply more appropriate for your child than others. In any case, parents should not make an enrollment decision without thoroughly checking out at least three separate quality schools or programs to make sure they are not just selecting the first place that sounds feasible.

5.) **"A six month placement should do it."** Turning a child's thinking around, or providing treatment for a child, takes as long as it takes. Experienced professionals can make a reasonable estimate of the time frame needed after getting to know your child. Each individual has evolving needs. Intervening with a struggling teen is nothing like fixing a carburetor.

6.) **"We are looking for a military school or a boot camp."** Both the military and struggling teens have changed over the last generation. The military, and military schools are more selective than they used to be; now they do not take young people with anything more than minor behavior problems. For the most part, the current generation of children who are in Emotional Growth schools and programs have not grasped the concept of cause and effect and don't understand how consequences work. They are more likely to learn positive attitudes from firm, consistent and appropriate consequences than they are to learn from punishment by a boot camp drill sergeant.

7.) ***"We can trust what professionals tell us."*** Every professional is human and has his/her own frame of reference. There is an old saying to the effect that "If you only have a hammer, soon everything will look like a nail." A child psychiatrist will tend to assume therapy and medication is necessary, an Emotional Growth or Therapeutic school Admissions Director will tend to assume the child needs to be enrolled, and a therapist will tend to think their own brand of therapy is what is required. Any professional recommendation should be evaluated in context of the recognition that a professional's personal philosophy and obligations ought to be mediated by the real expert's knowledge, that is: the child's parents.

8.) ***"We don't need to tell the school/professional everything our child has done."*** Parents sometimes don't tell professionals some of the worse things their child has done. This is usually an attempt to increase the chances of their child being accepted by a particular school or program. This sometimes gets the child enrolled, but it also increases the chances that enrollment will become a disaster when the school or program is faced with some behavior or pathology for which they are not prepared.

9.) ***"We will save some money by finding a school or program by ourselves without the help of an educational consultant."***

This can be a false economy. A placement that falls apart can be very expensive to parents, both financially and emotionally. Anything that reduces the odds of a placement failure can save a lot of money and trauma. Parents are free to represent their own interests without calling on a trained and experienced professional in a variety of settings, for example, representing themselves in Court, facing an IRS tax audit, or enrolling their child in an Emotional Growth school or program. **However in each situation, the knowledge, reputation and experience of an appropriate professional can be invaluable.**

When parents are contemplating enrolling their child in a residential program, a qualified and experienced independent educational consultant can help them clarify their needs, and share a wide knowledge of many different programs with the parent. As a result of the educational consultant's long working relationship with schools and programs, he or she is in a good position to advocate to them on behalf of the child and parents. An Educational Consultant can: help the parent avoid common mistakes covered in this article, warn parents if a quality school is having temporary problems that might negatively affect the chances of a successful enrollment at that time, and be a sympathetic and knowledgeable third party sounding board for the parents' thoughts and concerns.

10.) ***"We don't need to get the other parent involved."*** A child needs the best possible relationship with both parents. When one parent attempts to cut the other parent out of the placement loop, not only does this deny the child's needs, but also gives the ignored parent the motive to sabotage the placement, and gives the child ammunition to manipulate both parents. What frequently happens when both parents don't agree on a placement is that a battle is set up between the parents, with the child and the school caught in the middle. When this battle develops, it is very difficult and often impossible for the school to help the child. With very few exceptions, a placement can be successful only when both parents agree and support the placement; or at least each parent needs to commit to not undermine the placement.

In all residential placement considerations, the needs of the child should be the top priority, with the desire on behalf of the parents to develop a better relationship with their child an almost equal priority.

(Condensed from the article "Ten Most Common Mistakes Parents Make," by Lon Woodbury)