

Religion and Church Matter

Adventists often talk about the joint work of home, school, and church. The church's role in spiritual development is clear, but participation in your local church also plays an important role in helping to reduce risk behaviors.

One way the local church is involved in risk reduction is by providing community. For this reason actual church attendance is essential. No matter where you live, attending church is protective either directly or indirectly. Religious participation is linked to reduced criminal activity. Teens who attend church more often are less likely to smoke, use marijuana, or binge drink.¹ Churches also tend to create local communities of like-minded peers and adults with similar values. These will help influence your child to avoid risk behaviors and to participate in constructive activities. This is why going to church is especially important for young people who have moved out or are attending college away from home. These kids are isolated from the adults and peers with whom they shared values. By attending church regularly at their new location, they are more likely to develop friendships with adults and peers that have similar values.²

Parents and the local church also should help young people increase their religiosity (the belief that religion is important). Religiosity has a protective effect for young adults. Higher levels of religiosity are linked with decreased risk of substance use.³ In a large study of adolescents, researchers defined religiosity more broadly: how strongly they perceived religion as important, how often they attended worship services, and their participation in religious youth groups. Those with higher religiosity had reduced risk behaviors in smoking, alcohol use, truancy, marijuana use, and depression. Teens with higher religiosity were often less likely to engage in sexual activity, although sexual activity has many more factors involved.⁴ However, those who start sexual activity typically show a drop in church attendance, so these young people need special care and encouragement.⁵

Churches have an important role to play by creating environments that welcome people of all ages, providing ways for people of different ages to build relationships, and providing programs to involve children and teens in service and other constructive activities. When parents help connect their children with the local church and help build religiosity at home, they will have the greatest impact. The next newsletter will discuss more about how to help foster church attendance and religiosity.

REFLECT

Too much importance cannot be placed upon the early training of children. The lessons learned, the habits formed, during the years of infancy and childhood, have more to do with the formation of the character and the direction of the life than have all the instruction and training of the after years. E G White, *Ministry of Healing*, p. 380

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Ten Values Every Child Should Know by D Habenicht (2000).

How to Help your Child Really Love Jesus by D Habenicht (1994)

Family Time Ideas: kidsministryideas.org/content/family_times

Raising Children to Delight in the Sabbath by B A Kay

archives.adventistreview.org/article/2201/archives/issue-2008-1531/raising-children-to-delight-in-the-sabbath

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4. Sinha, J. W., Cnaan, R. A., & Gelles, R. J. (2007). *Adolescent risk behaviors and religion: Findings from a national study*. *Journal of Adolescence*, 30, 231-249.
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