

## **Keller, R. (1989). The twelve steps for kids. A leader's resource manual. Prince of Peace Publishing, Inc.**

Growing up is tough, scary, lonely, and frustrating. Growing up is confusing. Growing up is challenging. Kids constantly ponder, "What should I do? Who should I spend time with?" These mental struggles are complicated by the bodily changes teens experience. And all of these variables become even more difficult to discern with constant invitations to have sex, watch more videos, do drugs and liquor, and listen to more and more heavy music. And finally, this becomes even more complex if kids do not have a good relationship with their parents or if their parents are divorced, too busy for their kids, or away from home a great deal.

Ron Keller addresses issues of growth and identity formation and suggests a solution to the many life's difficulties in the form of a "Twelve Steps for Kids" program. Ron has worked extensively with the twelve-step process through Ala-Teen, Adult Children of Alcoholics, Al-Anon, small groups, and Twelve-Steps for Christian Living groups. Ron believes that Christians are teaching kids to be schizophrenic: to act one way in a Christian environment and another way when away from the Christian setting. The result is that kids are forced to choose between Christian and "real" lifestyles. Ron's goal is to reach out to youth leaders who can provide twelve-step opportunities for kids to help them learn to live fully integrated lives with honesty and integrity. As stated in the Bible,

Jesus made a tour through all the towns, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom and curing all kinds of diseases and sickness. And when he saw the crowds, he felt sorry for them because they were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is rich, but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest." (Matthew 9:35-37)

In many ways, today's kids mirror the crowds described by Matthew. They are harassed by noise, temptation, distractions, materialism, and peers. They are constantly bombarded with "static" activity-sounds and challenges. Their spirits have little rest. They are in motion from morning until night. They have no solitude. They are harassed. Kids must be given the opportunity, platforms, and models to learn how to face this harassment. They must learn how to have and use solitude.

Many kids are also dejected, bewildered, cast down, disheartened, depressed, weak, and troubled. In many ways, kids feel hopeless. They often have little guidance. TV has become their mentor and friend. They are truly like sheep without a shepherd: wandering about; seeking something to live for and die for; seeking something to believe, hope, and trust. They need to be challenged, encouraged, and nourished.

"Twelve Steps for Kids" is designed for all kids who need help with these pressures of daily living. Besides the challenges of daily life, every teenager has an unusual problem or struggle that makes life even more difficult. "Twelve Steps for Kids" is helpful to kids at anytime, but especially in struggles. The program addresses all of life's major problems, issues, and challenges by offering the following:

- \* Tools and guidelines for living.
- \* A group, a place to belong.
- \* A program for personal growth.
- \* Friends.
- \* An adult friend, model, mentor, guide.
- \* Spiritual nourishment.
- \* Clean fun and adventure.
- \* A good church family and recognition as a valuable person in it.

## **THE TWELVE STEPS FOR KIDS**

1. I admit that I am powerless over certain parts of my life and that I need God's help.
2. I am coming to believe that Jesus Christ came in a human body, that He is here with me now in Spirit, and that He has the power to change my weaknesses into strengths.
3. I turn my will and my life over to Jesus Christ, my Savior.
4. I begin honestly listing what I know and discover about myself: my strengths, weaknesses, and behavior.
5. I am ready to honestly share with God and another person the exact nature of my strengths, weaknesses, and behavior.
6. I humbly ask Jesus Christ to change my weaknesses into strengths, so that I will become more like Him.
7. I make a list of the people that I have hurt and become willing to go to them to mend the relationship.
8. I make amends with the people that I have hurt, except when to do so might bring harm to them or others.
9. Each day I do a review of myself and my activities. When I am wrong, I quickly admit it. When I am right, I thank God for the guidance.
10. To keep growing in my relationship with Jesus Christ, I spend time each day praying and reading the Bible. I will gather with others who do the same. I ask Jesus for guidance and the power to do what he wants me to do.
11. I am grateful that God is changing me through these Twelve Steps. In response, I will reach out to share Christ's love by practicing these principles in all that I do.

## **CONCLUSION**

The goals of a "Twelve Steps for Kids" group are integration and balance. What is sought for kids is health, wholeness, and a blending of the physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual dimensions of life. Kids need to feel accepted as imperfect and to have a realistic view of spirituality as well.

## **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

1. How can youth worker utilize the "Twelve Steps" in one's own life? And in work with kids?
2. What typical objections would be expected from parents and teens? Why? How can these objections be countered?
3. Do you have personal objections or misconceptions about twelve-step programs? Should they be used only with addicted people?
4. Is a twelve-step program relevant to a Christian lifestyle?

## **IMPLICATIONS**

1. There is currently no comprehensive measure testing the value and impact of a twelve-step group for kids. However, it is known that kids benefit from a safe, non judgmental, environment in which they can share and be supported, where they can be encouraged to change, take risks, and grow, and where they will receive a spiritual perspective—a new way to look at themselves freely and honestly.
2. Parents, teachers, social workers, and youth leaders should become familiar with and utilize this extremely useful and relevant tool. The "Twelve Steps" are for everyone. The program provides a blueprint for living a whole and balanced life.