

# THE COUNSELOR

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Stephen Rossi, M.A., L.P.C.

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## THE YOUNG ADULT YEARS: TRIALS & TRIBULATIONS



James returned home from college last week. He withdrew after the second semester because of his failing grades and excessive drinking. Vivian is twenty-four and finds herself depressed and struggling with her job and relationship with her boyfriend. Thomas, age twenty-seven still lives at home with his parents and has been fired from his last three jobs. He smokes marijuana daily and just can't seem to get his life together. Sandra is twenty-two, overweight, and has severe panic attacks. She works part time and attends junior college. Sandra relies heavily on her mother to direct her life. Mark, almost thirty, is addicted to pornography. He feels lonely, isolated, and unable to break free from his debilitating habits.

### Major Challenges

Young adults (eighteen to thirty years old) face tremendous struggles. High school is behind them, now they are challenged with completing the next phase of their lives. Young adults feel pressure to become more independent, leave their parents, achieve in college or vocational school, develop a career, find a mate, marry, begin raising a family, and make their mark in the world. Many have low self-esteem and are ill-equipped. They are still overly attached and dependent upon their parents. Many are depressed, anxious, addicted, confused, angry, and fearful of making it on their own. The young adult's primary psychosocial dilemma is to resolve the crisis of intimacy

vs. isolation (Erikson 1963). They long for that deep intimate relationship in which they can express and receive love. Failure to resolve this developmental issue often results in isolation and loneliness. These issues compounded by the demands of modern living create considerable stress for our young adults. They are hard pressed on all sides. Many young adults want freedom and independence but like the comfort and support of their parents. They want to make their mark but don't know where to start. They want long-lasting, loving relationships, but have no good examples, experience, or self-confidence in this area. They repeat the same self defeating patterns.

### Problems

#### Difficult Transitions -

Unresolved problems in childhood (fears, separation anxiety) spill over into adolescence. Insecure children often make insecure adolescents who have great difficulties adjusting to young adulthood. They hold back from progressing in school, vocation, and relationships. They sabotage success by not following through with goals and commitments.

#### Unresolved Identity Issues -

They struggle with serious questions like "who am I, what group do I belong to, and where am I going with my life?" Confusion, doubt, insecurity, and fears persist.

#### Generation X Issues -

They distrust authority, parents, government, and corporate America. Many are prone to rebellion, animosity, violence, and passive aggressive defiance of rules. Some are alienated from mainstream society.

#### Depression -

Feelings of worthlessness, helplessness, and failure prevail. They feel overwhelmed and defeated by the demands of life.

#### Addictions -

Many use alcohol, drugs, and sexual compulsions to deal with pressures. They try to escape from the demands of living. They may also use drugs to alleviate their boredom and emptiness.

#### Anxiety/Fear -

There are problems coping with everyday stress. Anxiety and fear may lead to obsessive thoughts, compulsions, and dreading the future. Their anxiety can be debilitating.

#### Relationships -

They have volatile relationships and difficulty making long lasting commitments. Their relationships are often plagued with infidelity, co-dependency, and sexual involvement without marriage. They fear commitment but long for intimacy.

#### Self-Confidence Problems -

Low self esteem is reflected in their self-doubt, and difficulty believing in themselves. They cannot see themselves succeeding. In many cases they have a history of underachievement or failures. They never really developed a high degree of self-competency.

#### Problems with the Law and Society -

Defiance may take the form of traffic tickets, public disobedience, drug and alcohol related arrests and accidents. They push the limits. Related problems include internet hacking, and undermining school and government programs.

#### Spiritual Confusion -

Many have serious questions concerning the existence of God, which sometimes generates anger, often directed toward themselves and others. They experience a deep spiritual void and intense emotional pain over the meaninglessness of life. This can lead to depression, suicide or violent behavior. They are searching for answers to a troubled self in a troubled world.

## Working with Young Adults

### Understand their Dilemma-

Realize that young adults have tremendous pressure living in a fallen world full of temptations, trials and dilemmas. They struggle, desire to make it, but often feel conflicted, confused and troubled. This is a natural struggle given their age and the world we live in.

### Respect them -

They are adults although they may not always act like it. Besides, children and teenagers need respect too. Today's young adults will eventually run the country. Respecting them acknowledges their importance, builds their confidence, and prepares them to lead the next generation.

### Connect with them -

Young adults need us. They need our love, attention, and time. They don't have to have it in the identical ways they needed it during their childhood and adolescent years. They need parents to reach out to them without trying to govern their lives. Young adults are prone to feelings of isolation, alienation and loneliness once they leave the "nest." Call

them. Visit them. Invite them over. Spend a few hours shopping, fishing, visiting, or going to the movies with them. Check in with them once in a while.

### Encourage them -

Do this with words, acts of kindness, and hugs (yes hugs!). Build them up. Let them know you believe in them even though they may struggle now. Tell them you know they will make it in the long run.

### Validate them -

Let them know they are important, significant, and that you admire them as individuals. God values and loves them, and as parents we should too. Give them your blessing.

### Empower them -

Give them opportunities to lead, take charge of something. This will strengthen their position and bring out the best in them.

### Help them -

Help them take greater steps toward independence. Assist them in taking the next step at college, a new job. Do this a few times

then fade back. They may need professional help if they are overly dependent and seriously struggle.

### Love them -

Give them real love. This includes giving them affection and behaving in a tender loving manner. Give them some of your time and money. Be there for them.

### Let go -

Do this gradually. Help them take steps into adulthood. Drive them to college. Visit with them about a new transition and reassure them. Acknowledge their feelings. Prepare them to leave the nest before the actual physical separation takes place. Talk about it. Help them make plans. Monitor what you do for them. Are you strengthening or weakening their position? Are you helping or hindering them? Give them more freedom gradually. Don't hold onto them because this will delay them. Don't bail them out, this will retard their growth. In some very difficult situations such as prolonged defiance, rebellion, refusal to get moving with their life and alcohol/drug involvement, the tough love approach may have to be applied.

## Free At Last!

They are emancipated now, free agents! They are free to exercise their privileges and responsibilities as adults. They are



more free to meet life's challenges. Newly l a u n c h e d young adults are free to develop more e m o t i o n a l l y and s p i r i t u a l l y.

They also have more freedom to change the world they live in. They do this through their work, personal relationships, community, church and government involvement. Young adults are free to vote, go to war, establish credit, buy houses, and begin raising families. They will experience some unexpected snags. They may still have to deal with tyranny of self, enmeshment with parents, issues of control, fear, and pride. Hopefully this process will lead them to yield to God and co-operate with Him. Some will have to overcome their dread of failing. Once they clear these major hurdles they are free to move forward, and live life more fully. They are free to step into the unknown with God and accomplish His purpose for them. They have hope and know that God has plans to prosper them and not harm them (Jeremiah 29:11).

## Future Leaders



It's exciting to see your child mature into a strong successful, effective, Godly, adult. They are ready to receive the baton from you. Healthy Godly young adults become God-driven leaders, who stand up and speak out for justice, truth, love, and Godliness. Your work, parents, will truly be rewarded when you see your grown children begin raising a generation of healthy effective children. They will value the nuclear family. These leaders will nurture, support, encourage, and love their families, friends and colleagues. They will change the world through their careers. They will accomplish these things through their relationships with God and His power, and because you have trained them up in the way they should go. These leaders will be fearless like Joshua and King David, bold, brave, servant leaders totally dependent on God. Our future leaders will admit their faults, fears, insecurities, and work through their problems. Congratulations parents, you have successfully raised your children to become strong, effective, Godly leaders!

## F.Y.I.

**Steve Rossi, M.A., L.P.C.**

**CHRISTIAN COUNSELORS  
OF HOUSTON**

9055 Katy Freeway, Suite 300  
Houston, Texas 77024  
(713) 984-1314 (Main Office)



## SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

**INFO: 713.984.1314**

- 11/28 - Working with Parents of Junior High Students Youth Pastor's Forum**
- 12/9 - Volunteer Training - KSBJ**
- 12/17 Shepherd Group - InSync Second Baptist Church**
- 1/28 Stress Management Second Baptist Church - West Campus**