

Introduction: How This Book Is Organized

I hope this book becomes a useful reference volume on the shelves of treatment centers, youth organizations, schools, and churches. Hopefully, people who want to work in difficult situations with young people at high risk will study it to clarify their understanding and evaluate their motives. It is especially intended for students of human behavior who wish to integrate their experience, study of behavioral sciences and theology.

To understand some of what goes on with troubled youth, to try to get to the bottom of it and put it all together, is an awesome task. As my family, students, others in the field and I have asked God's help for its writing, may you also seek divine grace and wisdom in its reading.

Each section of chapters looks at troubled youth in different ways. Each of these parts concludes with a chapter of particular theological reflection.

Part 1 deals with the scope of youthful troubles and our style of response; it prepares us for the challenge of responding to troubled young people. Chapter 1 suggests that since the context of young lives is so complex and confusing, we need certainty about a Way. Their postmodern context makes our use of stories especially important. Chapter 2 previews global and personal dimensions of the book. Chapter 3 concludes this first section with a biblical reflection on the way Jesus approached troubled people.

Part 2 emphasizes the importance of growth and socialization. It further prepares us for our consideration of specific crises in the lives of youth. Chapter 4 considers the

importance of growth and how society has warped God's intended growth process in many ways. Chapter 5 drives us into our subject with stories of violent death in the urban, the working class, and the more affluent suburbs. We pause in chapter 6 to reflect on a theology of suffering.

Part 3 is the heart of the book, the longest and most difficult section. Chapter 7 considers trauma and resiliency in situations such as children in war; while chapter 8 looks at disorders behind the suburban shootings of the 1990s; chapter 9 looks at disadvantaged environments, the context for urban gangs, crime, and drugs; chapter 10 acknowledges child abuse when young children kill other children; and chapter 11 considers various types and factors in suicide. Chapter 12 takes a challenging look into the nature and a theology of violence.

Part 4 examines other risks young people face—sometimes as relief from violence, often inter-related to violent acts. Addictions like smoking, drinking and drugs are discussed in chapter 13, and sexual deviations in chapter 14. Chapter 15 moves toward healing and personal wholeness, and chapter 16 moves to the larger issues of justice and peace.

Along with the text of these chapters you will find:

- questions for personal reflection or group discussion
- an exercise providing a chance for you to respond to a given case
- suggested resources besides the concluding bibliography

Hopefully this book will prepare you for, and enrich your ministry and deepen your thinking as you integrate personal experience with the behavioral sciences and God's Word. Hopefully, it may also reveal places in your own life which need healing and encourage your personal growth.