This book covers the developmental and health problems unique to the adolescent period of life. It focuses on special needs and public health programs for adolescents. It offers deep insight into smoking, violence, teen pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, and other problems, along with intervention and prevention strategies.

ADOLESCENT HEALTH

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“This textbook presents an excellent balance in weighing the evidence from the risk and the resilience literature, incorporating research in racially and ethnically diverse populations.”—Renée R. Jenkins, MD, FAAP, professor, Department of Pediatrics and Child Health, Howard University College of Medicine

“This is an engaging, thorough, and thought-provoking statement of our knowledge about adolescence."
—Wendy Baldwin, PhD, director, Poverty, Gender, and Youth Program, Population Council

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RJD
To Sahara Rae—the brightest light in my universe, the axis on which my world revolves, and the center of my heart—with all my love. To my lovely, talented, and supportive wife—a partner in so many ways.
To my wonderful family for being understanding and accepting.

JSS
To Jennifer, Isaac, and Jacob, who make life worthwhile, who keep me honest, and who tolerate my solitary scholarly propensities.

RAC
To my family and my colleagues—all of whom make life exciting, rewarding, and bring simple pleasures to life as a scholar.
FOREWORD

Practitioners and researchers interested in youth development and health promotion will find Adolescent Health: Understanding and Preventing Risk Behaviors an excellent source for informing their work. This volume serves as a textbook for graduate students in public health, medicine, social work, nursing, and other behavioral sciences. Knowledge about adolescent health issues should also be incorporated into schools of education so that future educators are informed about the need for collaborative interventions.

I wish that I could invite all the contributors to Adolescent Health to sit around in my living room, where we could chat informally about teenagers. The gathering would include most of the “gurus” of youth development who have labored for years to track the prevalence of problems and the outcomes of interventions. I think there would be a strong consensus that we have accumulated a large body of evidence that many young people growing up in this country face enormous barriers to maturing into successful adults. We would agree that other young people have the necessary equipment (support systems, fortitude, and resilience) to make it, as long as their institutions (family, school, community, and the media) don’t fail them.

We would concur that this volume contains most of what practitioners need to know in order to help adolescents overcome developmental barriers and achieve healthy lifestyles. Risk areas (such as substance abuse, violence, pregnancy, and depression) are explored in depth and the interrelationships between them clarified. Areas of resiliency (youth assets and connectedness) are investigated and illuminated. From this rich source of research findings, we would conclude that young people must be attached to strong adults—if not their parents, then some other person. We would focus on the fact that children must receive attention early enough in their lives to prevent later problems and that they must have access to the requisite social skills to relate to their peers.

In addition to interventions focused on individuals, we would pay attention to the development of comprehensive community-level programs that link together what goes on in the schools with other interventions. Some of the participants in this discussion would be making the case for more refined “theories of change,” while others would argue in favor of more research and evaluation. A strong rationale would be given for changing social policies—gun control, driving regulations, condom distribution, racial desegregation, and school reform. These subjects would generate plenty of steam.

I would not be surprised if the conversation in my living room eventually turned from research and policy to personal experiences with raising children. It is quite a shock when your own children start “acting out,” experimenting with drugs and sex, skipping school, or downloading forbidden material from the Internet. I am currently
dealing with my grandchildren’s developmental issues—they are two beautiful young women, aged thirteen and fifteen. When their parents turned to me for advice, assuming that I was an authority on adolescent behavior, I replied (sheepishly), “I think you have to be stricter or more lenient.” I am certain that the gurus gathered here would confirm that it is more difficult to solve one’s personal problems with raising children and preventing risky behavior than to prescribe broad social measures.

I have observed, however, that my grandchildren receive almost unlimited attention from their parents: listening, shopping, driving, cajoling, monitoring, cooking special dishes, helping with math homework, and, most important, hugging. If the essence of this attention could be bottled and sold, many of the problem behaviors so clearly documented in this book might be averted.

Practitioners, researchers, students, and parents should find the material in Adolescent Health indispensable for gaining an understanding of the complex lives of teenagers today. Most of these authorities claim that more research is needed to complete the picture, particularly on intervention outcomes. However, as readers will observe, enough is known to focus on intervention. Our society owes each new generation the opportunity to grow into effective and healthy adults. The need today is urgent.

Joy G. Dryfoos
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to acknowledge all our wonderful and talented contributors for their time, effort, and dedication. Their research, practice, and advocacy make life better for all adolescents. We thank Andrew Pasternack, our editor, for his encouragement, steadfast support, and valuable feedback; Seth Schwartz, whose acumen and assistance have been instrumental to creating this volume; and Seth Miller, for his diligence in producing it.
The primary aim of this volume is to inform health care professionals about adolescent risk-taking behavior; its epidemiology, consequences, prevention and treatment. Our book is intended as both a professional reference and classroom text. It takes a multifaceted approach that includes an epidemiologic assessment of the impact of health risk behaviors, a synthesis of the empirical literature describing factors associated with the onset and maintenance of health risk behaviors, a description of relevant intervention strategies and programs designed to prevent or reduce health risk behaviors, and an examination of social and health policy issues relevant to each health risk behavior. Acknowledging that behavior does not occur in a political or social vacuum, the policy perspective is designed to provide a frame of reference for understanding the scope of the problem posed by specific health risk behaviors and the parameters and options available to effectively confront these adolescent health threats. Authors describe trends and changes in risk behaviors, morbidity and mortality over time; illustrate theoretical models useful for understanding adolescent risk-taking behavior and developing preventive interventions; review the state-of-the-science with respect to prevention strategies for each risk behavior; and identify effective treatment modalities. Special populations at risk and emergent crosscutting issues in risk and prevention research are also presented. Finally, each chapter provides an opportunity for the authors to offer directions for future research relevant to specific health risk behaviors. In each case, we have sought out the leading experts to contribute these chapters. We are humbled and grateful to benefit from their scientific acumen, their wealth of experience, and wise insights.
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