

RESOLUTION ADOPTED BY THE 1982 NATIONAL PTA CONVENTION DELEGATES

CULTS

Whereas various cults often recruit members by deceptive means; and

Whereas cults often keep their members by using mind control and by alienating  
the members from their families; and

Whereas many families have deep emotional scars caused by their children's  
dependence on cults; and

Whereas an awareness of the recruitment and retention techniques of cults  
could help prevent a young person's entry into a cult;

Therefore be it resolved that the National PTA urge state PTAs/PTSAs and  
their units to hold education programs to inform families and youths  
about methods of recruitment, and techniques used to exercise control over  
members' thoughts and actions by cults;

And be it further resolved that the national PTA provide a list of available  
resources to assist state PTAs/PTSAs and their local units in planning  
such programs.

# Advocates for America's Children

by Ann Kahn  
National PTA President

The teenage years are a time of personal searching for most youngsters. For parents, dealing with the emotional changes occurring in their youngsters is much more traumatic than watching the physical changes we are geared to expect. We try to stay close without being overbearing, try to make family life a source of support and stability, and share in the testing of values and concepts that we think should be accepted on face value. Our patience is tried and we keep reminding ourselves that love overcomes all.

But for some parents, there is not a happy ending to the teen years. Listen to this letter from the parents of an 18-year-old daughter, a four-year scholarship student at a prestigious New England college: "It was early September when the postcard came. It read in part: 'I have found a new family, a new way of living and even have my own spiritual advisor. Please do not worry about me.



## Presidential Alert

Parents: We need your feedback on how effective the National PTA's efforts to encourage record labeling have been. Do the records your children buy have labels indicating possibly objectionable lyrics? Or do they carry the lyrics on the back cover? Is this helpful? Let us know. See article on record labeling (page 35) for specific information.

I have free food and clothes. Don't try to find me."

This youngster joined one of the estimated 1,000 to 3,000 cult groups in the United States. A Stanford University study found that three percent of high school students in the United States belong to cults, and more than 40 percent indicate they would accept invitations to a cult function.

Young people who are especially vulnerable to the manipulations of cult leaders have several characteristics in common. They are under stress (a family death, a broken romance or a lack of academic success). They are usually naively idealistic, unassertive and want very much to belong to a group that accepts them. Many are searching for a very different type of religion than that to which they may have been exposed at home.

Cults can be very successful with such young people, manipulating them through sophisticated techniques of persuasion and mind control, turning them against family and traditional institutions. Through extensive control of information and a limited number of alternatives from which young people are permitted to select, cult leaders can exercise enormous influence and make otherwise thoughtful young people turn over their lives and their consciences to a single powerful leader. They may be sent into the streets to raise funds (all of which may revert to the leader), become ill because of bizarre dietary practices, miss out on years of normal social intercourse or education and lose the opportunity to develop essential skills necessary to becoming independent adults.

This is not a minor or unimportant problem. It is estimated that several million young people are caught in these surroundings, in poor health, unable to contact families, and generally subject to the complete domination of a charismatic leader regardless of the consequences to their lives.

While some cults are benign, others are involved in incredible ritual satanic practices. Children born in some cult communities have no names or birth certificates so they are difficult to trace. There is a judicial record in some communities of astonishing physical and sexual abuse of young people.

Following are some resources for parents to turn to for help if they suspect

their teenagers are involved in a cult or heading in that direction.

**The American Family Foundation**, PO Box 336, Weston, MA 02193, is a clearinghouse for information and assistance. On their board are representatives of major religious faiths and professionals in psychiatry, psychology and law enforcement.

**Boys Town Center**, Boys Town, NE 68010, published *Cults and Kids—A Study of Coercion* by Robert W. Delinger. This case study is about a young religious studies major at Princeton University who was recruited by the Unification Church. Details are given about the effect of constant fatigue, isolation and the incredible indoctrination techniques used to process cult recruits away from their past lives.

Parents need to be aware of the vulnerability of teenage youngsters to the seemingly innocuous, semi-religious approach of cults. The best defense for youngsters is the development of self-confidence and a questioning mind that does not accept statements without testing them with common sense.

Children need a healthy respect for their own cultural heritage, the ability to be assertive and to apply problem-solving skills against the pressures of sophisticated adults. They need to ask questions and to seek answers.

As a parent, you need to ask questions about your child's association with groups that are unknown to you. Pay attention to unsolicited mail that comes into your mailbox addressed to your children. A most important protection is the open communication between parents and children. This is critical in dealing with the magnetism of cult leaders.

The passage through the teen years and the preparation for becoming a responsible adult take patience and attention by everyone in the family. The price of missing or ignoring signals from teens along the way is great.

*On behalf of the National PTA I recently attended a meeting entitled "Cultism: A Conference for Scholars and Policy Makers" sponsored by the American Family Foundation and the Neuropsychiatric Institute of the University of California, Los Angeles. This article is based on the conference.*

*For the PTA's position on cults, see the 1982 resolution on page 39.*