

Understand teenagers? Yeah, right.
Teenagers understand themselves and others? You've gotta be kidding!

By Nancy Moran

A few years ago while managing a Junior Achievement program, I discovered one of my passions: working with young people. Being with more than 60 students from local high schools and a broad range of backgrounds, I learned a lot and gained a better understanding of the many issues today's young people are facing.

Teens behave differently than adults; yet, in many fundamental ways, we are all alike. Teens (and adults) can learn to identify their behavioral preferences, their strengths, how they communicate with others, how they make decisions, how they are perceived, and why they react the way they do.

One of the training programs I facilitate is "Improving Your I-Sight." It is a learning instrument that uses a model called DiSC®, a proven approach to understanding human behavior. Incorporating a religious aspect and biblical references, combined with an inviting, interactive approach, I-Sight is a simple and fun learning resource designed to engage teens and pre-teens in the context of their own life experiences. The program, designed specifically for young people ages 12-18, is a self-directed process that encourages honest responses.

How does it help teens understand themselves and others? There are several ways.

It allows young people to identify their behavioral style:

D – Direct and Active

I – Interested and Lively

S – Steady and Cooperative

C – Concerned and Correct.

Once they know their preferred style, they explore ways to understand more about themselves and others. For example, a "D" style is competitive, has a desire to win, questions the existence of rules, demands a lot of attention, is easily impatient, and dislikes wasted time or senseless activities.

An "I" style prefers working with others, is persuasive, enthusiastic, easily frustrated by working alone or quietly; and their goal is to please others and to be liked.

An "S" is interested in working with others, thrives on consistency and organization, is threatened by change or spontaneity, and is frustrated by variation in routines.

The "C" thinks before making decisions, possesses high standards, likes figuring things out for themselves, and feels threatened when work is questioned or criticized.

So why is it important for young people to have this information about themselves? Basically, this recognition helps them accept differences, reduce conflict, understand how to handle peer pressure, and leads to more productive relationships. Most importantly, they learn how to approach other young people to share God's love.

One of my favorite aspects of sharing this program is when the young people have that “aha” moment! In fact, one student – a first-time offender in the Kane County Juvenile Diversion Program – said, “I may not have gotten kicked out of the house if I had known this about myself sooner.”

God made each of us to be different and unique – not wrong, just different. Understanding our behavior is like knowing our name, how tall we are, what color hair or eyes we have, and what hobbies we enjoy. The more we know about ourselves and others, the more we can understand each other and get along.

God has given me the gift of connecting with young people, and I have a strong desire to use that gift for His Kingdom. Teens need to know that someone cares and understands the challenges and struggles they face. They tell me I’m not their parent, teacher or preacher. In fact, a group of at-risk high school students in a suburb of Cincinnati, Ohio said, “You’re not a cop; you’re not a narc!”

Young people are our leaders of tomorrow; but they need to be able to handle their life today. And if we are going to reach our friends and share the love of Jesus Christ and truly turn the United States into a Country that God blesses, we must start today to understand ourselves and others by improving our “I” Sight.

Nancy Moran & Associates is a full-service training company, specializing in human behavior. Nancy's experience has proven beneficial in training teens and pre-teens, parents of teens, and youth leaders, as well as educators. She worked with Strategic Focus Cities/Celebrate Jesus 2000 and is actively involved in the Character Counts! program in her community. She can be reached at 630/372-8984 or toll-free at 866/372-8984.