

# HIGH RISK ADOLESCENTS AND SATANIC CULTS

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There is an alarming increase in the number of teenagers with severe behavior problems, including violent behavior and drug abuse. Psychiatrists, and mental health professionals, as well as police officers, are also coming across a new breed of adolescent, one involved in bizarre satanic cult activities ranging from gathering in cemeteries to performing benign ritualistic activities, to drinking blood from self-mutilation and animal sacrifices.

A cult can be defined as a group which follows a dominant leader, accepts his claims, doctrines and dogma and obeys a set of determined commands. The satanic cults follow a religious belief system proclaiming an allegiance to the devil. The cult has specific rituals that are used to channel power from Satan to the followers. The cult activities give them a sense of belonging, identification and power. The troubled youths who feel a sense of isolation, meaninglessness and powerlessness are attracted to them. Heavy metal music is another significant factor which impels young adults toward cult activities.

A large majority of adolescents grow normally. They outgrow rebellious behavior, experiments with alcohol and drugs and gradually give up identity with rock musicians, long hair and wearing earrings. However, 20-30% of vulnerable teenagers may develop moderate to severe behavior problems which may lead to persistent defiant behavior, substance abuse and/or involvement with satanic cult.

There are several factors which motivate adolescents to join cults. *Curiosity and exploration* are the major factors in younger teenagers who are looking for excitement (and possibly free drugs), to get high. The feeling of *alienation* increases the vulnerability to become attracted to cult activities. Adolescents who grow up with *low self-esteem* and *poor ego strength* develop a sense of identity with cult activities. Another dynamic factor for adolescent's involvement in satanism appears to be "*power*." Self-mutilation, animal sacrifices and drinking of blood as a ritual give them a false sense of power. This sense of power is further enhanced with the drug use and continuous preoccupation with heavy metal music dealing with power, sex and satanism. Cults' dogma of freedom of choice and will mean

doing whatever you want, whenever you want. There is no God, no guilt and no conscience. Cults provide an opportunity to satisfy fantasies and offer escape from pressure and the hard realities of life.

## Stages of Involvement In Satanic Cult Activities

I. *Experimental Stage* — A vulnerable adolescent (a rebellious child with moderated behavior problems and/or substance abuse), is introduced to a cult group by a peer or lured towards cult activities by an adolescent or adult recruiter. Begins to experience identification with cult groups. Shows unusual preoccupation with black clothes, darkness, blood and death, heavy metal music, satanic messages and devil worship.

II. *Excitement Stage* — Fear and curiosity is replaced with excitement and fun. Completely detached from family and alienated from friends and society. Develops a sense of belonging and identification with the cult and loyalty to the leader. Participates in rituals which attain religious significance. Begins to participate in ritualistic animal sacrifices.

III. *Involvement Stage* — Regular attendance of ritualistic activities including animal sacrifices and drinking of blood. Shows leadership role. Recruits younger adolescents by offering free drugs and indulgence in sexual activities. Engages in violent and sometimes criminal activities without feelings of guilt. Collects paraphernalia and literature on satanic cults and magical powers. Experiences false sense of supernatural power.

IV. *Final Stage* — Joins the elite group of devil worshippers. Belongs to highly organized cult group. Regularly participates in highly ritualistic activities including violence, torture, brain washing, incestuous relationships, sexual abuse of children and human sacrifice. Strong faith and belief in satanism as an organized orthodox religion.

## Warning Signs

Considering the increasing number of vulnerable youth involved in satanic cult activities, early

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recognition of adolescent involvement is necessary. Psychiatrists, physicians and parents should be familiar with the warning signs: withdrawal and alienation from family, unusual preoccupation with black clothes and darkness, increased interest in supernatural and occult literature, increased rebellious and aggressive behavior, violence, sexual activity, frequent drug and alcohol use, increased preoccupation with heavy metal music supporting cult activities, drawings of satanic symbols such as 666, upside down cross, pentagram, circle and goat's head, and the satanic bible.

### **Therapeutic Alternatives**

Teenagers must be prepared to recognize the danger of joining cult activities, and insight must be developed regarding the consequences. Through psychiatric treatment and psychotherapy, they must be made aware that more serious involvement of ritualistic activities make them insensitive to inflicting pain and may lead to more serious violent and criminal behavior with serious consequences. Expose them to alternative individual and group activities to experience healthy excitement and thrills. Build ego strength and self-esteem through psychotherapy so that ritualistic activities will not remain the major source of self-esteem and power. One should be cautious since adolescents who are involved in satanism may develop depression and guilt, and even suicidal ideas, once they begin to develop insight.

Developing strong ego strength is also necessary in order to deal with serious co-dependency in leaders. Adolescents who come from dysfunctional families, with a history of child abuse and sexual abuse are extremely hard to treat. Family therapy can help when parents are cooperative. If home environment is not healthy, a long-term residential program may be a better alternative. Individuals who have been more deeply involved in satanic cults show more serious psychopathology. They manifest symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, multiple personalities and sometimes psychotic behavior. These problems should be treated according to pathology. Early recognition of behavior problems, drug use and involvement in satanic cults by parents, teachers and health professionals may prevent a vulnerable adolescent from destruction. ■

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#### **Bibliography**

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