



## **Wilderness Program**

### **Our daughter is really out of control. My husband and I are considering sending her to a wilderness program or therapeutic boarding school, but we are very hesitant. We really feel we are out of options. How did this happen and what do we do?**

This is a difficult question for any parent to ask, but you are not alone. Many families have faced this same concern; however, wilderness programs and therapeutic schools can change lives.

Many children act out during their adolescent years; this is a normal part of the maturation process. However, when the turmoil is beyond typical teen troubles, a major intervention is often needed. Students are sent to therapeutic programs for a variety of problems such as drinking, drugs, depression, bi-polar disorder and the list goes on. The common feature that underlies all of these issues is self destructive behaviors that create crises.

Parents, typically, are not at fault when their teenagers misbehave. Unfortunately, many feel they are bad caregivers if they use a wilderness program. It is important to understand that there are multiple factors that contribute to the destructive downward spiral of teenage behavior; and it is a good parent that realizes the situation is beyond their control.

Consider that most parents have experienced multiple failed interventions by the time they decide to send their child away. Typically, most have talked with multiple doctors, visited with a variety of therapists, and interacted with numerous school professionals. Unfortunately nothing seems to work and these parents rightfully fear that their children will fail out of school and become unproductive members of society.

The teenager is not happy either. On some level, they know they are struggling, but they often lack the maturity to reflect on the depth of their circumstances. They become angry and decide that it is easier to lose their thoughts in drugs, alcohol, and/or the computer, than it is to participate in a healthy, productive lifestyle. These kids lack the ability to change and need assistance to transform.

Any parent would be saddened by the thought of sending their child away. Some parents, however, understand that a residential environment is the best choice for their family. It is also a particularly complicated decision as there are hundreds of programs that offer a variety of services, and a very small number of programs have received some bad press for a variety of reasons.

To avoid any pitfalls and to ensure that you are using a reputable program with a quality therapeutic staff, I highly recommend working with an educational consultant. These professionals have extensive training and background with placing troubled teens. Consultants spend a significant amount of time on the road visiting schools and meeting with staff. They are extremely knowledgeable individuals that will not only help you choose the best programs, but also guide and support your family through the entire process.