

Six Stories About Teens That Captured Our Attention in 2010

By Russell Hyken for [St. Louis Kids Magazine, 12-29-10](#)



My work with teenagers and their families provides a unique perspective on the state of the world. I spend days listing to the profound, as well as the improbable, reasonings of 14-year-olds, and I find that most teens have a sense of the bigger picture. I also believe that most will go on to do truly great things.

Many Top 10 (or in this case, Top 6) lists mention stories about teens that have caught the nation's attention. These are stories that caught my attention as a counselor – they got teens talking and shaped the culture of 2010.

1. Teen Mom

This top-rated MTV show that follows the lives of four teen moms and their babies has drawn more than 6 million viewers. Many, however, view this show as controversial and question if MTV is glorifying teen pregnancy. Those who watch it know the show paints a realistic and unglamorous portrait of life as a teen mom, even if the girls have become celebrities and appeared on numerous magazine covers.

2. Teen bully suicides

Teen bullies have always generated news stories. 2010 was a particularly unique year because these acts of teenage torture resulted in two highly publicized suicides. Phoebe Prince committed suicide in May, and nine teens were charged in connection to her death. More recently, Tyler Clementi jumped to his fatal end after being harassed, and two teens were charged in connection with his death. These teens who tragically ended their lives have prompted national discussions that will, hopefully, lead to specific laws that prevent such harassment.

3. Teen adventurers

Most adults think of risky teen behaviors as drinking and drug use. These adolescents took a different type of risk by engaging in positive thrill seeking and pushing their mental and physical limitations. Jordan Romero, at 13 years old, not only climbed Mount Everest this year, but prior to becoming a teen, he also attacked five of the world's tallest mountains. Abby Sunderland, at 16 years old, unsuccessfully attempted to sail solo around the world. While some say this adventure was a poor parenting decision, you can't deny that she is an incredibly motivated and courageous individual.

4. Teen Barefoot Bandit

Colton Harris-Moore, aka the Barefoot Bandit, went on a two-year crime spree across nine states before being arrested in the Bahamas. To evade the law, he stole boats and cars and became a self-taught pilot. This “high-tech Huck Finn” reached rock star status with more than 30,000 Facebook followers. While I don’t condone his behavior, I can only imagine what this kid could have done as a member of his high school’s student council. I am sure 2011 will bring a book and movie deal.

5. Teen "sexting"

Sex made its way into the digital age long ago with “adults-only” websites. Now, however, teens and some preteens are engaging in a new trend – sexting. And parents, you should be scared.

According to the [National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy](#), 20 percent of teens have sent nude photos of themselves and twice as many have sent sexual text messages or emails. Until this year, teens caught sexting were being charged with child pornography offenses. Now there are proposed bills that would change the punishment to community service, small fines and appropriate education. Teaching teens that an impulsive act could alter the course of their lives forever is a valuable lesson to learn that extends well beyond this latest trend.

6. *Glee*

Glee does not actually star any real teens, which is why I hesitated to include it on this list, but it has gotten everyone (teens and adults) talking about high school and teen issues. This is not a show for young kids, but it highlights real-world adolescent problems such as teen pregnancy, emerging sexuality of gay and straight students, self-esteem issues, bully behaviors and much more. *Glee* also features a diverse cast including minorities and special needs students who rarely get the TV spotlight. And even I can’t resist the catchy tunes and well choreographed dance numbers. *Glee* is both pure entertainment and powerful portrayal of typical teen struggles.