

## **The Problem of Peer Rejection and Persecution**

Most parents want to protect their children as long as they need it, but many feel helpless to provide what kids need in order to withstand the relentless onslaught of temptation and pressure. Despite parents' best efforts, many teens are rejected and persecuted.

This peer rejection and persecution may occur for a variety of reasons:  
for religious beliefs,

\_\_\_\_\_  
noncompliance to the group,

\_\_\_\_\_  
refusing drug use,

\_\_\_\_\_,  
athletic limitations,

\_\_\_\_\_,  
conformity to adult guidelines,

\_\_\_\_\_,  
physical handicaps,

and virtually any conceivable behavior, word, thought, or deed that identifies one as somehow different from the accepted social norm.

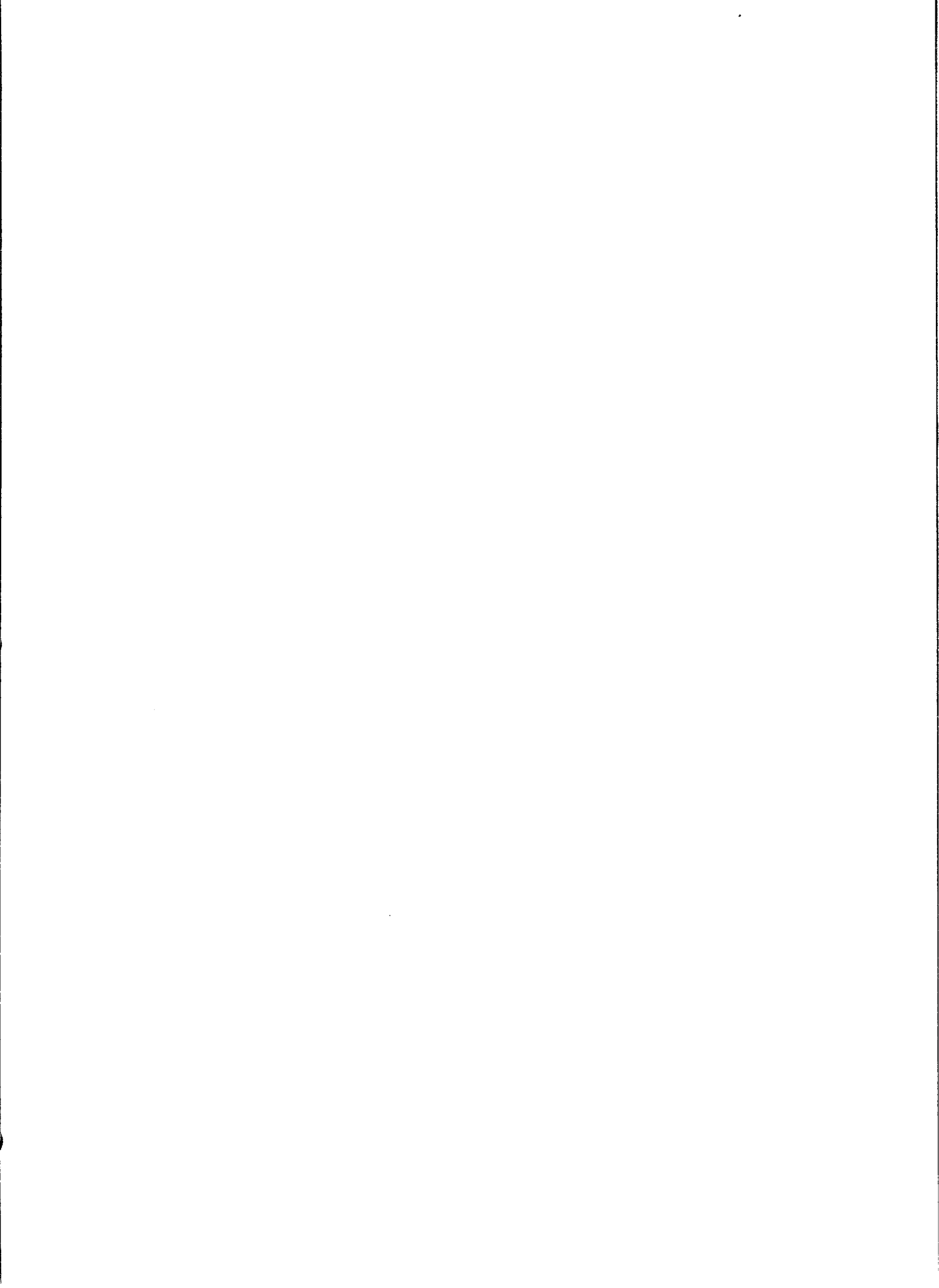
Some of the least-enjoyed teens are both the bullies and the bullied. Bullies are often disliked for their cowardly attacks on their smaller and weaker victims.

The bullied are often viewed with contempt because of their inability to stand up for and defend themselves.

Parents have long advised teens to stand up to adverse peer pressure, much like the advice of former first lady Nancy Reagan in her "Just Say No" anti-drug campaign in the eighties.

Teens remember for a long time the embarrassment and pain of peer rejection, abandonment, and grave injuries resulting from trying to fit in.

The common occurrence of teens banding together in groups based upon language, music, and dress testifies to the fact that security needs dominate the life of teens.



Well-meaning parents endeavor to equip their teens for the battle for their minds, wills, and emotions. Some have the idea that we can guarantee our teens will manage peer pressure well in spite of our preventative measures. We cannot guarantee our teens will handle peer pressure well even with good training in the home. All young people are at risk.

By the time they reach high school, they feel that in order to have relationships, they have to give up some central truths about themselves. At times bizarre behavior by heretofore well-mannered teens can only be explained and understood by the need to belong and fit into one's peer group.

The price of admission is often more than one can pay. Peer rejection can wound young kids in such a significant manner that it contributes to feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, and chronic tendencies toward depression.

## **I. The Causes of Peer Rejection and Persecution**

Many factors contribute to the problem of peer rejection and peer persecution.

### **A. The Vulnerable Teen**

Teens who tend to be more vulnerable to this problem range from apparently healthy teens to those who have been identified as high risk for many years by parents, youth pastors, and teachers.

#### **How do we identify a vulnerable teen?**

The vulnerable teens who are seen as fairly healthy and intact are usually found, upon closer inspection, to have hidden **emotional deficits**. Vulnerable teens frequently have several factors in common that render them susceptible to the influences of others.

#### **1. Family Factors.**

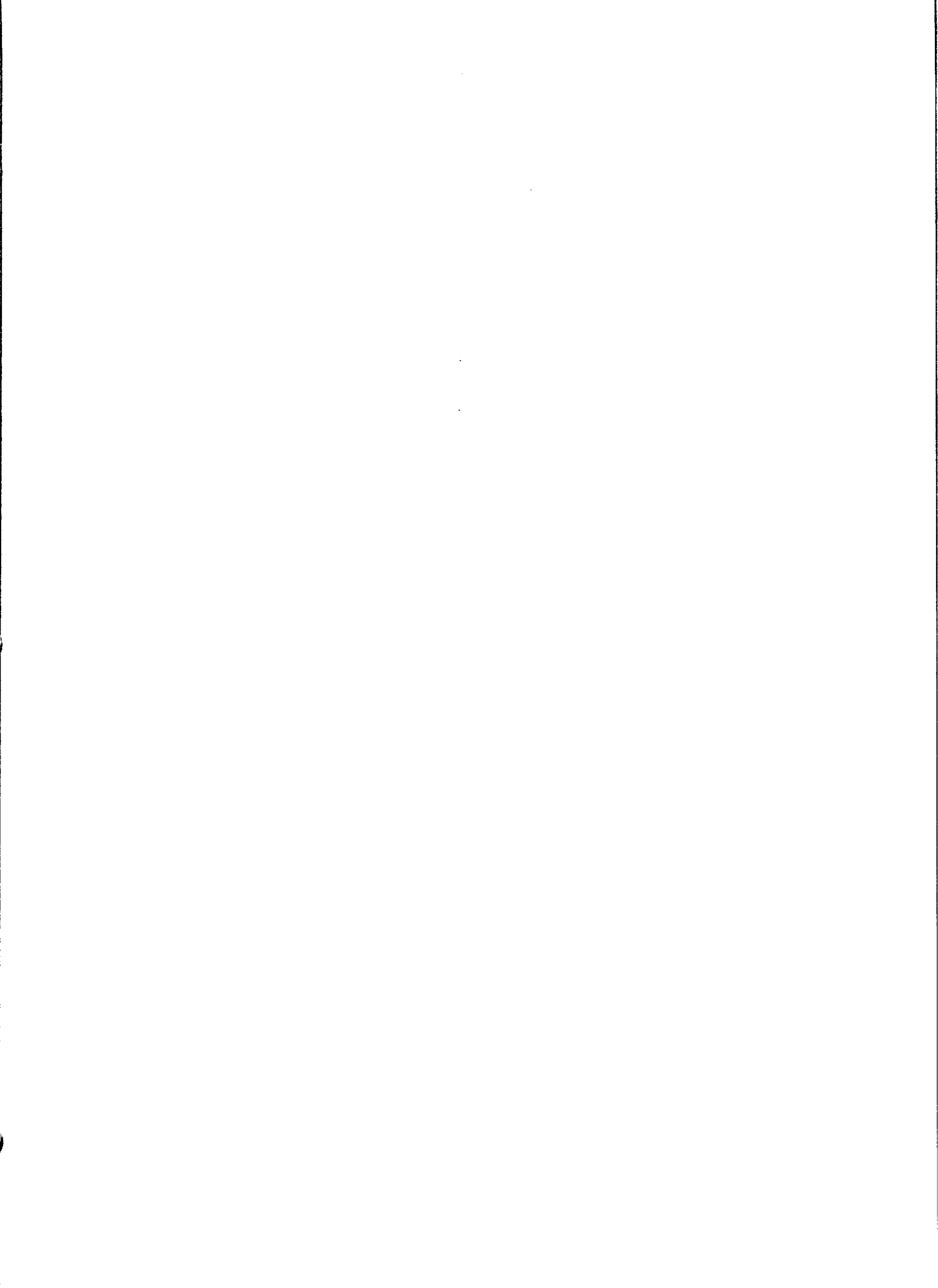
Families of teens who struggle with peer rejection and persecution are often troubled themselves. These families will generally be marked by divorce, marital conflict, alcoholism, authoritarianism, and general difficulties providing a secure, safe, and nurturing environment for their children.

#### **2. Social Factors.**

Teens most vulnerable to pressures and rejection tend to be found in two different categories.

1- They are either socially isolated and alone

2- Are relating to groups of peers who are also vulnerable to pressure. These teens are seen by others as ineffective and unattractive, and frequently are the targets of negative attention.



Teens with learning disabilities are especially vulnerable to these feelings of failure.

### **3. Self-Esteem.**

Positive self-esteem is one of the best insulators against negative peer pressure. Teens who have self-confidence, a healthy identity, and an accurate estimate of themselves are typically more discerning regarding social conformity.

### **4. Ego Strength.**

Teens who show deficits in the following areas exposing ego weaknesses are more prone to engage in group behaviors without careful evaluation:

- Teens who are impulsive,
- Teens who show difficulty delaying gratification,
- Teens who demonstrate poor frustration tolerance,
- Teens who have little ability to adapt and cope with changing circumstances,
- Teens with poor ability to tolerate both negative and positive affects,
- Teens with limited ability to think in terms of cause and effect,
- Teens with limited ability to establish true peer relationships, and
- Teens who have some distortion in their sense of reality.

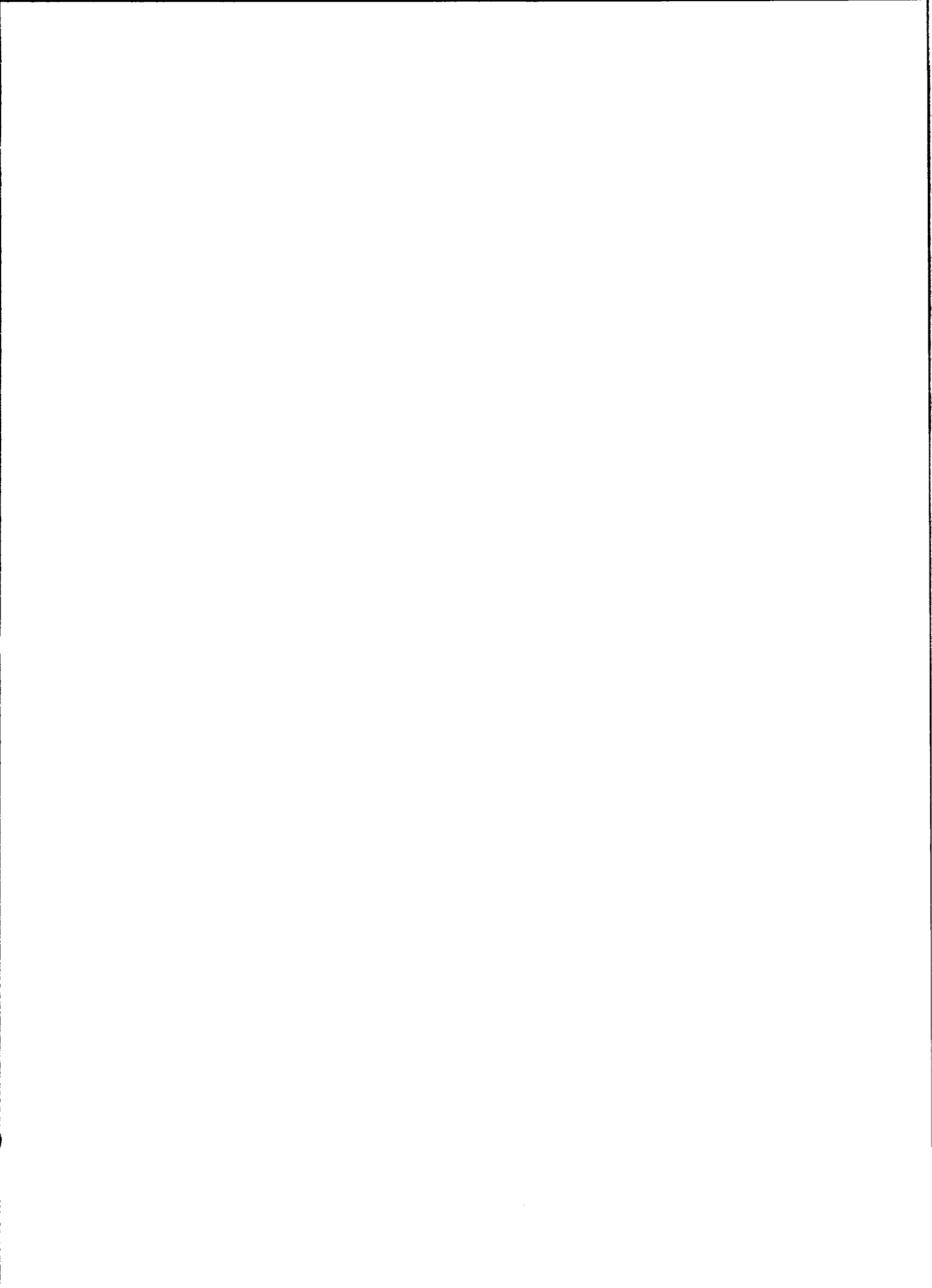
### **B. Participating Teens**

Early-identified teens are typically excessive in their intimidation and influence on others; other teens are more clever and limiting their exposure to authority figures.

The following factors are common elements of both overtly and covertly controlling teens.

**1- Family Factors.** Families of teens who are controlling, both overtly and covertly, are usually characterized by leadership that is authoritarian, controlling, and intimidating. The intimidation is expressed in both physical threats and abandonment threats to force the family members to obey and conform.

Teens who use similar tactics seem to have identified with the aggressive parent and now seek to victimize others as they were once victimized. Thus the cycle of control is passed on to the next generation.



## **2. Social Factors.**

Teens who exercise control and influence over others are typically charming, self-absorbed, and have social skills that enable them to convince and persuade others to accept their point of view.

## **3. Self-Esteem.**

a. These teens have underlying poor self-images.

They are frequently well guarded and deny that they have deficits in this area.

b. They are also characterized by **constantly changing friends** as they feel a need to attract new friends to provide newer emotional supplies when old friends become ordinary.

Participating teens who are more physically intimidating have low self-images and are immature, shallow in relationships, and generally fearful of risking true peer relationships.

## **D. Ego Strength**

These teens have the same general ego weaknesses mentioned above.

## **III. The Effects of Peer Rejection and Persecution**

The youth leader or adviser will note that the following effects of peer rejection and persecution are complex and will require careful assistance to accurately assess how to help.

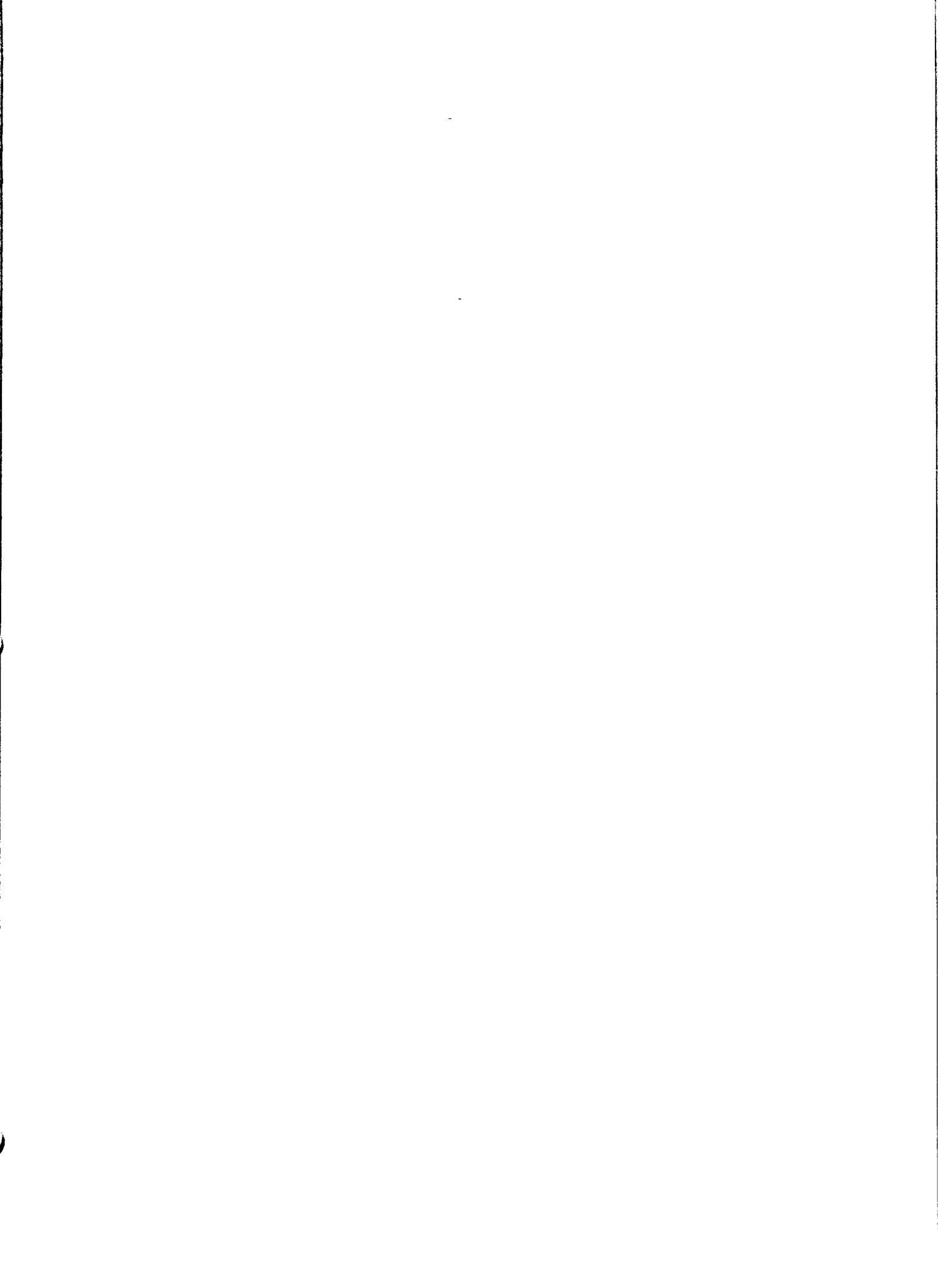
### **A. Depression**

Teens who are struggling with peer rejection and persecution will report feeling lonely, hopeless, and helpless. They may say such things as, "I wish I was dead." In their hopelessness they may take a self-destructive turn and justify their obvious life-risking actions. They might say "What difference does it make what happens to me? No one will miss me anyway."

### **III. Expressions of Depression**

The following expressions of depression need to be particularly attended to: extreme moods of crankiness, anger, irritableness, or sadness; irrational displays of emotions; high levels of intensity that are not matching to environmental precipitators; self-loathing comments; decrease in school performance; and negative moods that last for weeks.

Peer pressure, in its most extreme cases, has led teens to commit to suicide pacts. Though this is a rare occurrence, when it does occur it is usually driven by a leader who exerts power and influence over the others.





Close friends of teens who attempt or complete a suicide are harmful to others. These teens are more at risk to attempt suicide than teens who are less close friends'

### **B. Social Isolation**

It leaves them with the scars of feeling inadequate, unlovable, and unwanted. These feelings can lead to poor choices for mates and future friendships.

### **C. Gang Affiliation**

Teens who join gangs do so for personal security, belonging, and a sense of family. They have to deal with resistance by gang members to let a member leave the gang.

### **D. Drug Use**

Many teens choose drug use as a way to cope with painful emotions that result from negative peer pressure, persecution, and rejection. They numb personal pain with chemicals rather than risk vulnerability in a relationship or a realistic awareness of their problems.

Researchers have found that peers who associate with non-drug-using peers have a much less likelihood of using drugs themselves.

### **E. Sexual Activity**

This represents some of the worst effects of peer pressure. Predator-like teens prey upon those weaker than themselves; when sexual pleasures substitute for real love, belonging, and acceptance.

### **E. Stress**

They start worrying about grades, test scores, sports, and socializing. Stress is the normal result of any circumstance that threatens (or is perceived to threaten) our well-being.

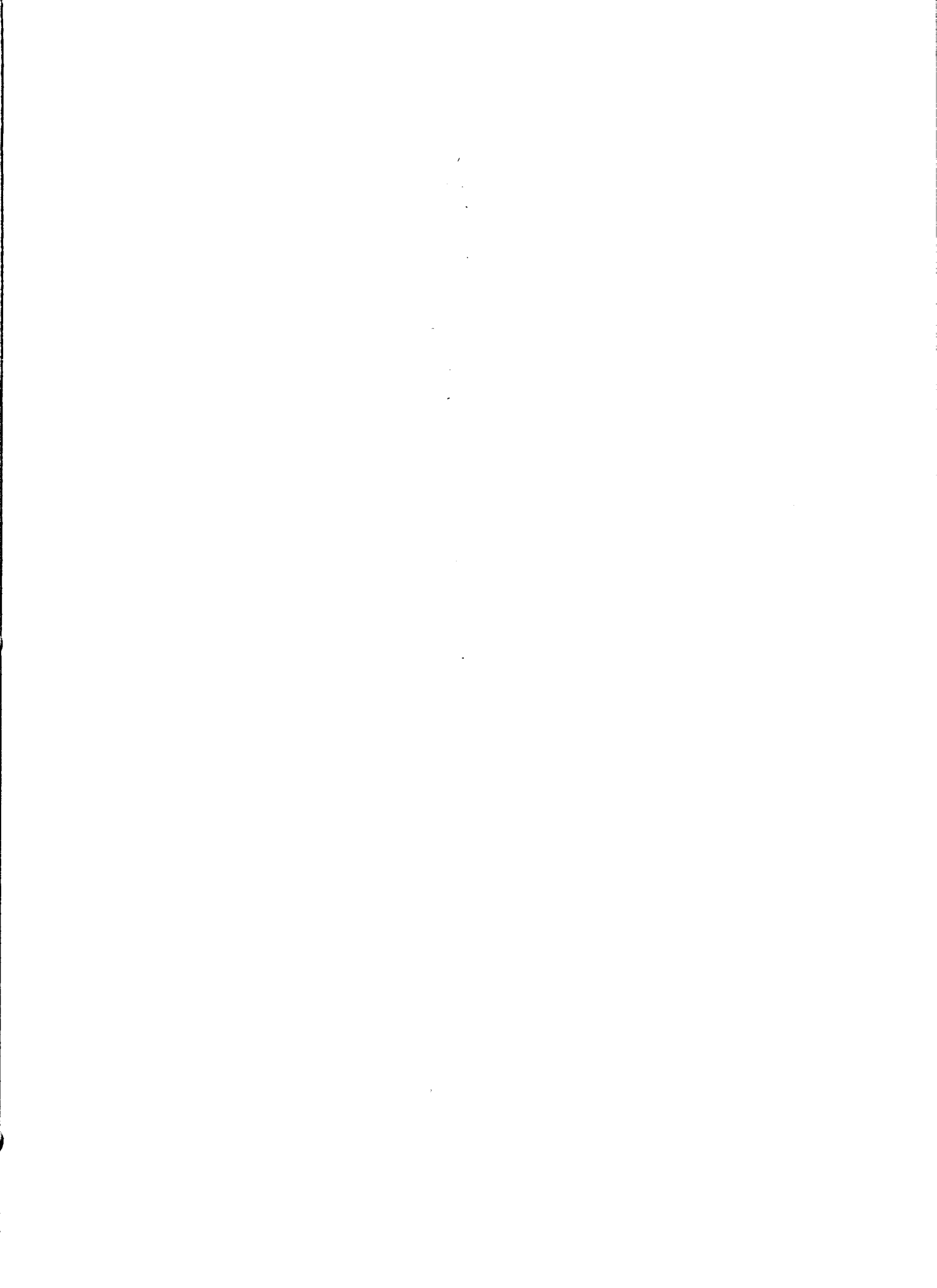
## **IV. The Biblical Perspective of Peer Rejection and Persecution**

One of the fundamental truths of Scripture regarding children and the family is found in

### **Genesis 2:24**

*"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."*

There is that protective and educative nature of the home that prepares the child to leave successfully and start his or her own home.



Teens who are vulnerable to peer pressure, persecution, and rejection nearly always come from homes where there is a lack of this preparation. This may be the result of many things, such as family discord, marital conflict, significant losses, and the temperament of the child.

**When proper emotional and spiritual attachment is provided in the home, teens can expect to gain the self-assessment Paul wrote about in Romans 12:3**

*3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.*

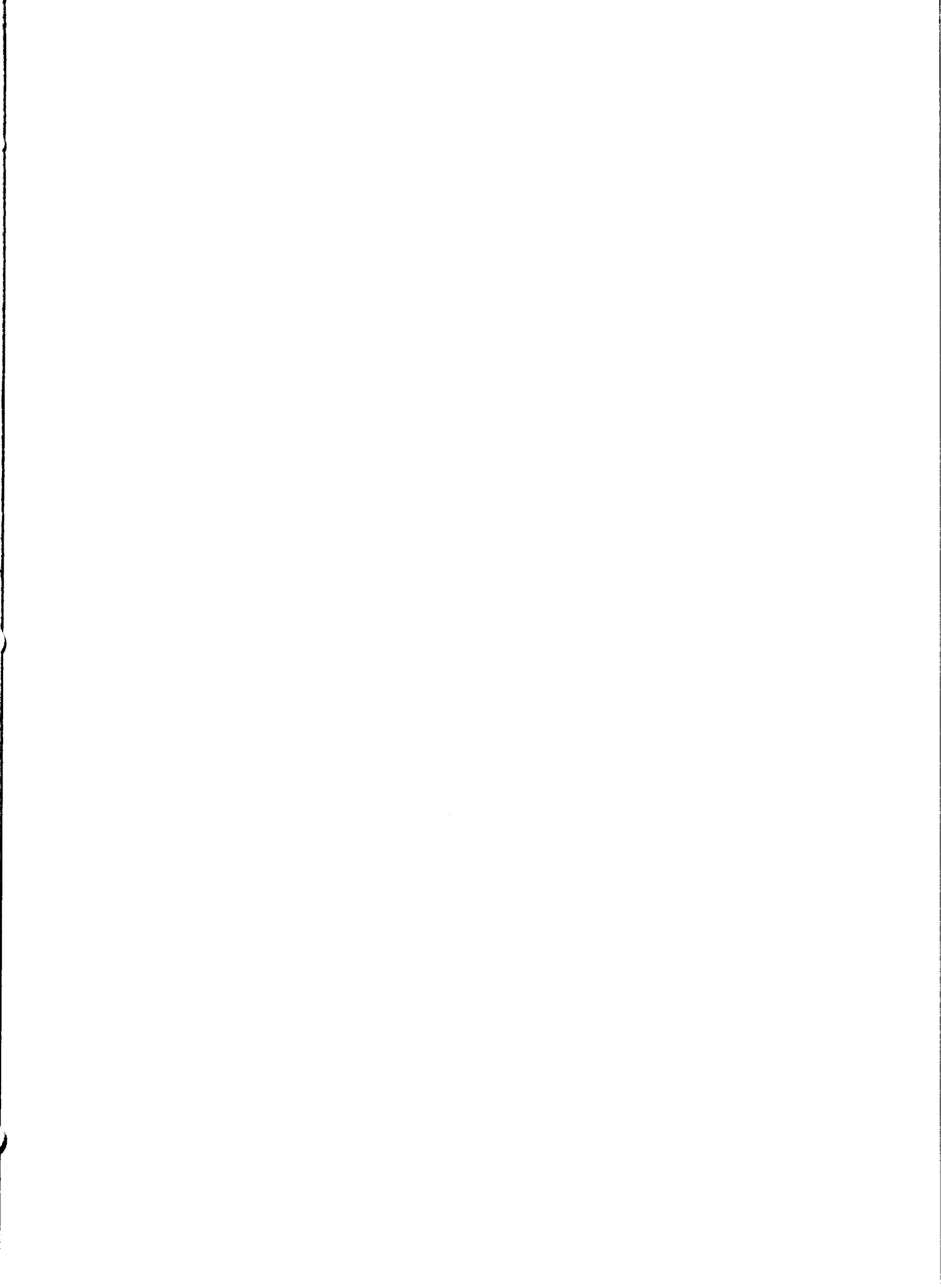
Teens need to know that they were indeed created in the image of God, as recorded in **Genesis 1:26**

*“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.”*

**Romans 12:1-2**

*1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*  
*2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*  
By faith we offer ourselves as a holy sacrifice and renew our mind to withstand the conformity of the world. The development of teens necessitates a relationship with God for them to turn out the way they should.

The Bible's answer to rejection and persecution is found in a personal relationship to Christ that is worked out daily in the prayers and fellowship of loving believers who support the teenager's development toward the unique plan.



## **Overprotective Parents**

### **I. The Problem of Overprotective Parents**

In regard to some parents, their concerns about their child prevent them from allowing him to do things that he's perfectly capable of doing." One day the child is going to have to leave home and function independent of Mom and Dad. One of the major tasks of parenting, of course, is to encourage enough confidence and capabilities in a young person to equip him or her for the future.

We as parents need to remember we are preparing one to be an adult and live his or her own life.

#### **How overprotectiveness is revealed:**

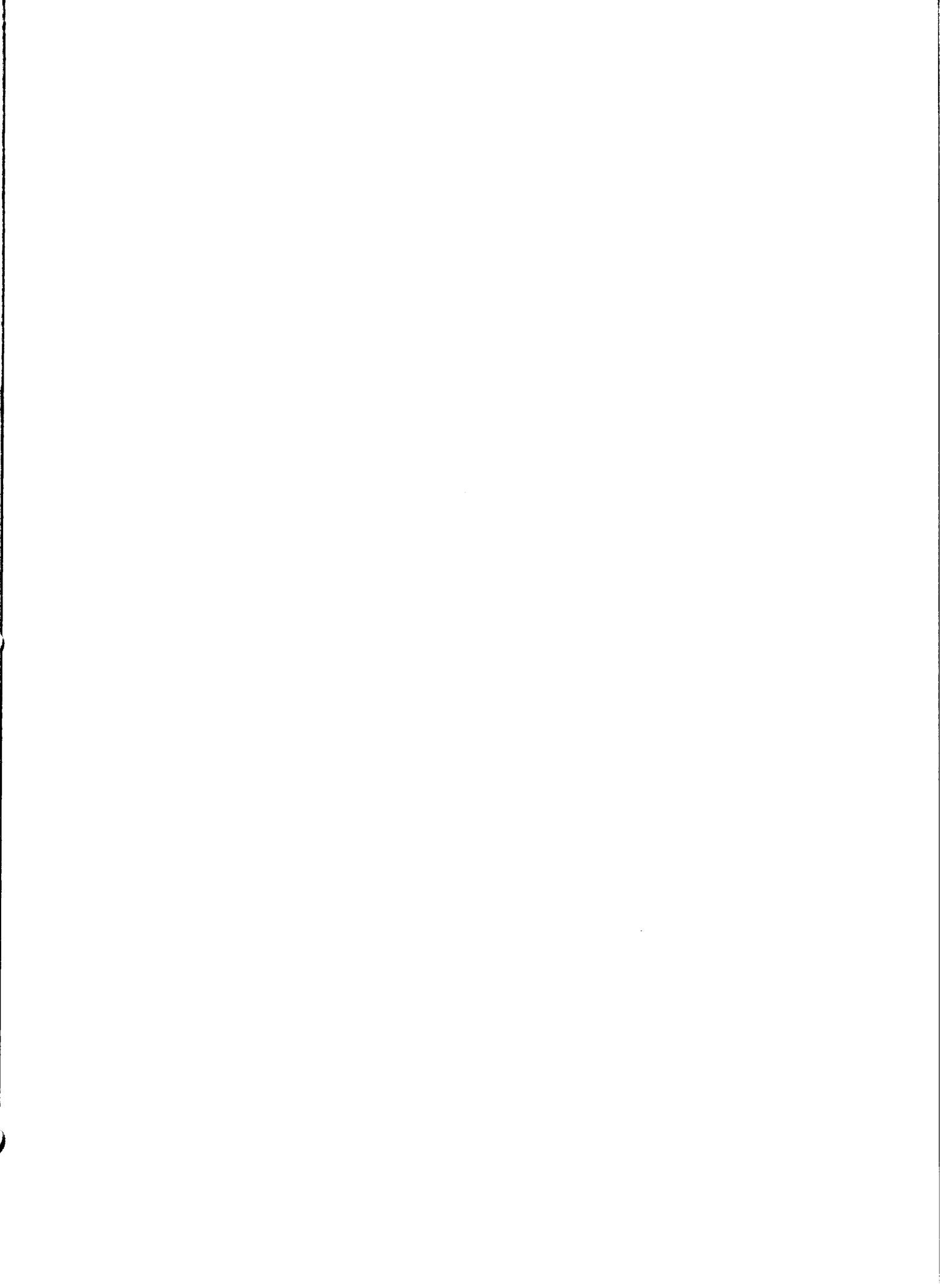
- Parents will not let the young person out of their sight except at school and, perhaps, at church.
- Parents relate to the teen very similarly to the way they related to the child as an eight-year old or ten-year-old.
- Parents screen or monitor the teen's phone calls.
- Parents consistently refuse permission for the teen to do things considered age-appropriate by other reasonable parents.
- Parents exhibit a determination to protect the child from all harm.
- Parents offer oversight of even the smallest details in the teen's life.
- Parents' actions and decisions seem designed to foster dependence, not independence.
- Parents' rules are applied rigidly and are equally nonnegotiable.
- Parents seem to have difficulty trusting the young person.

### **II. The Causes of Overprotective Parenting**

There are a variety of reasons parents respond to their task in an overprotective manner. Such behavior may be founded upon one or more of the following causes.

#### **A. Fear**

Fear is a common factor among overprotective parents. Today's world is a frightening place in which to raise children, and many parents worry about their children's vulnerability to the dangers they see featured on the evening news.



***B. A Sibling's Rebellious Behavior***

Overprotectiveness may also stem from a sense of failure with another (typically older) child. The parent thinks because an older child messed up his or her life, the younger child may do so.

***D. Parents' Past***

If one or both of the parents had neglectful or ineffective parenting, they may respond by becoming overly protective.

***E. The Child's Misbehavior or Shortcomings***

If a parent views a child as immature, incapable, or limited by physical, mental, or developmental handicaps, he may respond by becoming overly protective.

***F. Lack of Relationship***

Many parents try to lay down rules without first establishing a real relationship with their children. Mom and Dad not just policemen or judge.

***G. Only Child/Death of Child/Adopted Child***

Parents of only children may tend toward overprotectiveness, perhaps more so than parents of two or more children. Fear of losing a child can motivate.

***H. Parental Loss or Emotional Needs***

Sometimes mothers who feel unfulfilled in their relationships with spouses will divert their pain by focusing obsessively on a child.

**III. The Effects of Overprotective Parenting**

***A. Anger, Depression, Rebellion***

***B. Increased Dependency***

***C. Eating Disorders***

***D. Panic Disorders***

***E. Low Self-Esteem***

***F. Emotional Withdrawal***

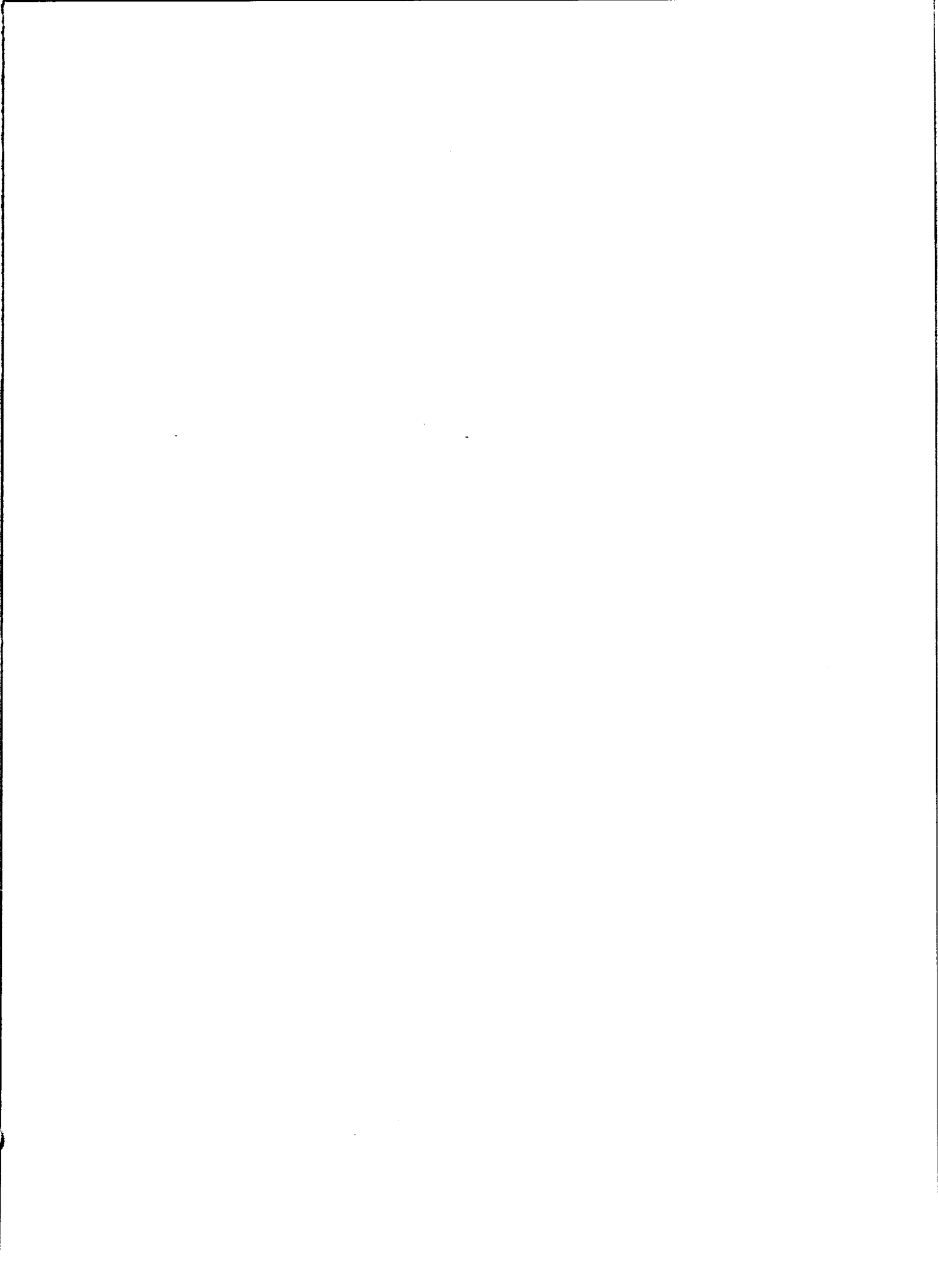
***G. Delayed Spiritual Growth***

**IV. The Biblical Perspective of Overprotective Parents**

First John 4:18 offers a telling perspective on parenting:

**1 John 4:18**

*"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love."*





The overprotective parent is frequently motivated by fear, a fear that may reveal a lack of trust in God, a lack of trust in the young person, or both. Doing so may mean sacrificing a measure of safety in exchange for healthy growth toward independence.

Children are commanded to honor their parents, but parents are called upon not to "exasperate" their children.'

**Ephesians 6:4**

*4 And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*

Are the parents' actions fostering healthy development and maturity in the child, or are they simply exasperating him or her? A wise parent will seek to give his or her child two things: roots and wings.

