

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM CELEBRITIES WHO ACT OUT

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We are seeing a lot in the news right now about young celebrities acting out, breaking the law, and getting arrested. I had a radio interview scheduled (which was pre-empted by breaking news) where I was going to talk about our fascination with celebrities and their problems. I was also going to discuss what we can learn from their behavior. I thought this topic might make for an interesting newsletter.

Why do these young women, (currently Brittany Spears, Lindsey Lohan, Nicole Richie, and Paris Hilton) who have beauty, talent, wealth, and fame, seem like their lives are out of control? We see them on television and in magazines living glamorous, party lifestyles. Yet there seems to be no substance to it. (Even motherhood for Brittany hasn't seemed to make a difference.) Why do they seem to lack self-esteem, make stupid decisions, and cannot seem to find joy in life?

Part of it is their age. Kids often make stupid mistakes (such as drinking and driving) when they are in their late teens and early twenties. Sometimes they have to pay the consequences of these choices for the rest of their lives. It's even worse for a celebrity. Can you imagine living with your mistakes constantly splashed on national media? How shameful is that?

The other problem is the availability of drugs for those with connections and plenty of money. If someone like Lindsay or Brittany has a drug or alcohol addiction, they become caught in a downward spiral that only leads to problems and heartache. They can try rehab, but they need to both a make a commitment to sobriety and make the necessary lifestyle changes--such as giving up party friends--to stay sober.

Many celebrities use their wealth and fame to help others. They draw attention to issues they feel are important or need to be changed. They support (or start) charitable organizations. They visit people who are disabled, ill, or suffering, and bring them hope and happiness. And they'll work--hands-on--to alleviate problem situations or build hope for the future.

These four women are still young, and social responsibility often develops when people are in their thirties. However, plenty of teenagers and young adults demonstrate concern for those less fortunate. These four don't seem to realize nor care about their responsibility as role models to others. Nor do they seem to realize, they (as do we all) have a spiritual responsibility to

use their advantages to somehow make the world a better place. They don't seem to be involved in charitable organizations, or doing acts of service to help others--or at least in more than a token way. (Although to be fair, they may be making financial contributions that don't reach the media.)

A huge part of the problem with young stars is that they have often grown up in a celebrity environment. They had fame and fortune at a young age. They never had a chance to reach maturity before having to handle the pressures that come with wealth and notoriety.

These women also don't seem to have had parents who provided the physical, emotional, and spiritual structure necessary to balance the child's life, protecting them and wisely guiding them into adulthood. I'm not saying these parents didn't love their children, I'm saying they didn't stay active and alert to guard their *mental* and *emotional* interests.

Many times the parenting/guidance of the "star" is taken over by agents or managers whose priorities are for the career and financial bottom line rather than the mental and emotional well-being of the child. For example: sex sells, so make the adolescent into a sex symbol, regardless of how it damages her.

Children receive a good part of their inner sense of self from the nurturing and love of their parents and other family members. Firm limits and enforced consequences for bad behavior are other important aspects of a child's development.

Celebrity children and adolescents often don't have limits or receive consequences for their behavior. Instead, everyone gives in to them, even when they are acting out. They have personal assistants and other staff to pick up after them and do their chores. In other aspects of their life, they are catered to. They never have to stand in line. They are given clothes and gifts, instead of having to buy them. They can get into clubs and drink when they are underage. They can talk or pay their way out of minor legal offenses. Therefore, they grow up with a sense of *entitlement*.

They believe they are entitled to do what they want, regardless of the consequences to themselves or others. They feel above the law or societal rules. They may be emotionally and spiritually empty inside, and thus seek to fill themselves up through partying, jumping in and out of relationships, and shopping. And they surround themselves with friends who will encourage this behavior, rather than limit it. Of course, no amount of partying, relationships, or possessions will make a difference in their inner

emptiness. But until they realize this and seek help, they will continue on their destructive paths.

With so much power and potential for good, they seem to live shallow, empty lives. They are negative instead of positive role models for others. With so much to live for, they often set themselves on a destructive path. And that's so, very sad.

So what can we learn from them?

FOR PARENTS:

First, of all, be very careful of putting your child in a show business career. Few children who succeed in the music or entertainment industry grow up to be emotionally healthy, successful adults. If your child is truly talented in music, acting, or dancing, encourage them in the profession *if they want to*. But don't push them because *you* need them to be a star.

This is true of other areas as well. We are all familiar with the pushy and/or controlling parents of children who excel in sports. I know too many talented children who burned out before they could succeed in college or professionally because their parent(s) pushed them too hard.

To raise healthy adults, parents need to give their children guidance and structure. They need to closely monitor their activities. Keep them too busy with sports, artistic endeavors, clubs, your religious organization, and family activities to get in trouble. Participating in these activities will also give children self-esteem, teach them self-discipline, and help develop important social skills.

Teach children about values. Set limits and enforce consequences to negative behaviors. To avoid them developing an attitude of entitlement, make them earn privileges or possessions instead of always being given them. Teach them respect for others

Let them know that part of what makes life meaningful is giving back in some way. Show them opportunities to be of service--feeding the homeless at your local shelter, building a house for Habitat for Humanity, taking a trip (sponsored by a college, charitable organization, or church) to a third-world country to help the people and learn how others live.

Diana, Princess of Wales, was a wonderful example of this kind of parenting. She strove to instill in William and Harry a sense of responsibility to others.

Now that the princes are adults, we can see that she succeeded in raising boys into men who take their responsibilities seriously.

THE TEMPTATION OF DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

The best parents in the world cannot completely protect their children from drugs and from alcohol abuse. If your child has a predisposition to drug abuse it only takes *one* incidence of drug use, and they are hooked.

Teach them about the consequences of drinking alcohol or drugs, show through your actions responsible social drinking, and monitor their friends and activities. Be alert to signs of drug use and alcohol abuse. Seek early intervention if your child begins to have problems in this area.

FOR YOU:

Look at your own decisions and the consequences of your choices. Are you making choices that will not only improve the mental, physical, and spiritual quality of your life and those you love, but will also make the world a better place? Are you using the talents you have?

Taking time to think about these questions is important. Hopefully, your answer will be, "yes." But if it's not, take some more time to think about what's lacking, and what you can do about it.

Sometimes, it's simply a matter of making tiny gestures. Smiling and saying, "Good morning," to co-workers will improve the office morale.

With more effort, you might dedicate a few hours a week or a month to a service organization. And, making a big change in your life, such as going back to school or changing careers may make you feel more fulfilled and able to contribute to others in a meaningful way.

Whatever your answer to yourself, I hope you are living a successful, joyful life.

Dr. Debra