



Lack of skills creates problems with teens

By Liz McMahan

Assistant City Editor

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— It's much easier for kids to get into trouble today than it was when he was a child, said Dr. Henry Petree.

"It is very difficult out there to be a kid, and it is very difficult out there to be the parent of a kid," Petree said.

A lot of those kids in trouble have parents who don't have the basic skills needed to deal with the problems their children have, he said.

Petree is one of two counselors trying to intervene with troubled teens coming through the Community Intervention Center at the Muskogee County/City Detention Facility.

He's asked the parents to come in for free counseling sessions.

"A lot of them don't have any parenting skills, they didn't inherit any," Petree said. "They're short on 'What do I do,' and they are so frustrated that it's unreal."

What he sees has led Petree to write a yet unpublished book on parenting, "In Perspective." It is a series of columns giving parents advice. He is offering it to newspapers and churches to publish one article at a time.

He said he compiled the articles after seeing parents asking, "What can I do? We're completely over our heads here."

"Muskogee County has got some really good parents, and I've met some of those, but I've met an awful lot of them who just don't have the skills," he said. "Is it their fault? No. Nobody taught them. Their parents didn't have very good parenting skills."

He said he sees two particular skills lacking: Communication and conflict resolution.

"Oftentimes, they have difficulty communicating with not only teenagers, but with spouses and the community in general," Petree said. "Now we have a teenager and a parent yelling at each other — not a good way to communicate — and now that we've started this yelling, it just cycles," he said.

Conflict resolution skills come in at a close second, Petree said.

"If we can't communicate, we can't resolve the conflict once we get it," he said. "That's when we call the police, and the young person ends up in jail or in counseling with me. It's not something people plan to do, it's just something that happens."

He would like to teach both skills to parents and teens, Petree said.

"Having those skills goes a long way in having a home that's not so full of turmoil and chaos and screaming and cussing and everything that goes on there," he said. "Unfortunately, they don't teach us those skills in school. We might graduate at the top of our class and not know how to communicate and when we have conflict, not know how to resolve it. So folks get divorces over that, and kids go to jail."

To learn more

For information on Dr. Henry Petree's book "In Perspective," call him at the Muskogee County Sheriff's Office Community Intervention Center, 682-7851.

Reach Liz McMahan at 918-684-2926 or [Click Here to Send Email](#)

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