

11. The Barricaded House



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To help adolescents recognize the contradictory messages of openness and withdrawal they may send to others.

1. Ask the adolescent to describe the illustration in their own words.

2. Highlight the metaphor.

- Discuss whether the house seems welcoming or unwelcoming. The adolescent will probably notice that the cleared entrance and several other clues suggest that someone lives there; however, the boarded-up windows imply that the occupants do not want to look outside or receive visitors. Faced with this kind of house, what impression do they have of the people living inside? Do they seem “normal,” unusual, or troubled?

3. Connect the metaphor to a problem the adolescent is facing.

SOCIAL SKILLS



Many adolescents have difficulty connecting with others - romantically, socially, or at school - without realizing that their own attitude appears closed and unwelcoming. Emphasize that this message is not conveyed by their clothing preferences or by how they decorate and claim ownership of their body, through tattoos, piercings, scarification, or jewelry. It is conveyed instead by a slumped posture, an evasive gaze, or a cutting tone of voice that, taken together, shut down communication.

Use the metaphor to explore a paradox of adolescence: maintaining a closed attitude - what others perceive when they see the boarded-up windows - while desperately hoping that someone will approach, symbolized by clearing the entrance. Do you feel like this house, welcoming and inhospitable at the same time? Do you think you have put barricades around your house? Are they always present, or only in certain circumstances? How do you show them to others? What reactions have they produced?

Adolescents may not be aware of their closed attitude, even if their parents have tried to discuss it. Between what a parent says and what the adolescent understands, the original message can become considerably altered. A parent might say, “You should get your hair cut. It looks as though you are always hiding behind your bangs, as if you had something to conceal.” The adolescent is unlikely to absorb the comment as intended and may instead conclude, “My father understands nothing!”

When people look at you, what impression do you think they form of the person living inside? Have you noticed that you attract certain kinds of people? Which people do you push away? Point out that the occupants of the barricaded house may not realize what image they project to most people; perhaps the same is true for the adolescent. Suggest conducting a personal survey by asking people close to them what they perceive in their overall attitude. In a group setting - a classroom or therapy group - it may be appropriate to invite participants or family members to comment on the image projected by everyone present, not only the adolescent, including what each person’s appearance and attitude attract or repel.