

Being a Nudist Teenager

In today's world, the societal pressures are very strong. Oftentimes, people succumb to peer pressure, and try to fit into the image of this "perfect" person. They think that to go somewhere in life, they can't be themselves—they have to be what others expect of them. Inner direction becomes terribly skewed, and, unfortunately, it is often lost completely. Right and wrong, as simple as they may seem, begin to blend together, and as a result, many bad decisions are made. The part of society that seems to be most affected by these factors are teens like myself. Somehow the desire to be popular and the struggle to be normal distort perception and mangle self-esteem. Appearance is everything, and true identity is nothing. Being a nudist, I am able to step back from all this and see what's wrong with the picture. I have the ability to look past the superficial elements and see the soul. And I have the power to stand up for what I believe in, against the grain of society, and be a leader, even if I stand alone. This is what I live for—not to be the most admired or part of the majority. I live to be me.

Many of my peers live behind this façade, a side of them they create for the world to see. It's what they think will make the world love them and what they think will make their friends envy them. "Without the mask where will you hide? Can't find yourself, lost in your lie..." This quote is from a song called "Everybody's Fool" by Evanescence. I think it describes how most teens (and many adults) act perfectly. Why must they hide? Why must their true self be hidden from the world and eventually lost in all the lies? Because it's easy. So much easier than admitting the imperfections, the flaws, and any little detail that might ruin their reputation. It's easier to be ashamed of yourself than to have others be ashamed of you. It's easier to agree than to try to be agreed with. And it's easier to see the flaws in your appearance than in your character. I'm not saying that these people are bad. They've just been force-fed this perfection idea their whole life and brain-washed into believing that the image makes the person. It takes a great revelation to finally realize that what you thought was real isn't. For most people, it takes most of their lives. For me, it was when I was born.

I have been a nudist my whole life and have definitely benefited from it. It has taught me self-esteem, trust, and honesty, but most importantly, I learned not to become part of what my father calls the "uni-brain," or in other words, I think of myself. The AANR Youth Leadership Camp has helped me

along the way. I could not be more grateful for all I have learned and come to realize in the last two years that I've been coming to this camp. Another thing I have learned from being a nudist is that no one is perfect. You can't pretend to be better-looking than you are at a nudist camp, and with no clothes to hide behind, people must know you by your personality and how you act. Friendships are much deeper and more real. Having no clothes to identify you gets rid of "labels," and people who would have never even talked to each other in the textile world become great friends because there's no initial judgment. For instance, when I went to FANR camp this year, there were two girls. They became really good friends. Later that week, one found out the other was a cheerleader. At Circle of Friends that night she said, "At school, I am a punk. I do not associate with cheerleaders, ex-cheerleaders, or future cheerleaders. I never would have even talked to her if I met her at school. I'm glad I met her here."

One more thing that nudism teaches me, or any other teenager for that matter, is that you don't have to be curious about each other's bodies, and you don't have to experiment. We've already seen what everything looks like, so we don't really care. Sadly, most teens don't know this. A large number of the kids at my school are already having sex. If they were nudists from the time they were little, that wouldn't be happening. Many also give into the curiosity about drugs and alcohol. They drink and drive, and do other stupid things with their impaired judgment. As sad as it may be, this is the truth. Nudist kids are way less likely to do any of these things, because we have enough courage to think for ourselves. Also, as nudists, we are taught to respect our bodies so we probably won't want to pollute or abuse them.

Body acceptance. Self-respect. Confidence in oneself. These are just three things that set nudist teenagers like myself apart from the pack. Nudism isn't just for adults—it's for all ages, and as often mentioned, highly beneficial to children brought up into the lifestyle. We know we don't have to fit into the "Madison Avenue" image or change our true selves to be liked. We're leaders, not followers. This is what I live for—to lead, to stand out. I live to be me.