



**TROUBLED**  
*THE FAILED PROMISE  
OF AMERICA'S BEHAVIORAL  
TREATMENT PROGRAMS*

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**READERS GUIDE**

Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. How familiar were you with “scared straight” or “troubled teen” programs before reading “Troubled: The Failed Promise of America’s Behavioral Treatment Programs”? How have the stories of Avery, Hazel, Mike and Mark changed your perception on boot camps and juvenile correction facilities?
2. What is the “troubled teen industry”?
3. At the beginning of “Troubled,” the author uses his own experience in these programs to offer what to the reader? How does his experience help or shape your reading of the stories of the other characters? Is his story an effective in-road?
4. In Hazel’s story, she finds herself amid a group of girls having a meal together in the woods. What is her response to her cohort and how does that change over the course of her time in wilderness?
5. Did learning about these programs from the perspective of children submitted to them change your view of how children are sometimes treated in the U.S.? How?
6. If you were/are a parent, knowing what environments the children were raised in and their actions at home, would you make the same choice to send the children away?
7. How do the programs dehumanize the young people who attend them? What are some specific examples. What are some of the techniques the “survivors” cite as evidence of manipulation, dehumanization, and abuse?
8. What elements, if any, are required to ensure the success of programs like Adirondack Leadership Expeditions, the Academy at Swift River or Cross Creek? If there are none, what alternatives to treatment might benefit the characters in

“Troubled”?

9. Discuss the differences between the home lives of Hazel and Avery and the lives of Mike and Mark. Do they differ? If so, how? If not, what similarities do their childhoods share?
10. In the epilogue, the author says he checks the locks on his bedroom door twice each night before going to sleep. Why might that be?

**Watch:**

*This is Paris: The Real Story of Paris Hilton*

On the celebrity’s brush with the troubled teen industry and how those memories haunt her today. <https://youtu.be/wOg0TY1jG3w>

**Listen:**

*The Lost Kids* Podcast

This podcast dives deep into the search for a missing teen, uncovering the dark and twisted business of tough-love programs for “troubled teens” and their ties to one of America’s most dangerous cults. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-lost-kids/id1514836398>

**About “Troubled”**

In the middle of the night, they are vanished.

Each year thousands of young adults deemed out of control—suffering from depression, addiction, anxiety, and rage—are carted off against their will to remote wilderness programs and treatment facilities across the country. Desperate parents of these “troubled teens” fear it’s their only option. The private, largely unregulated behavioral boot camps break their children down, a damnation the children suffer forever.

Acclaimed journalist Kenneth R. Rosen knows firsthand the brutal emotional, physical, and sexual abuse carried out at these programs. He lived it. In *Troubled*, Rosen unspools the stories of four graduates on their own scarred journeys through the programs into adulthood. Based on three years of reporting and more than one hundred interviews with other clients, their parents, psychologists, and health-care professionals, *Troubled* combines harrowing storytelling with investigative journalism to expose the disturbing truth about the massively profitable, sometimes fatal, grossly unchecked redirection industry.

Not without hope, *Troubled* ultimately delivers an emotional, crucial tapestry of coming of age, neglect, exploitation, trauma, and fraught redemption.

**About the Author**

Kenneth R. Rosen has written for the *New Yorker*, the *New York Times Magazine*, *VQR*, and the *Atlantic*. He is a contributing writer at *WIRED* and the author of *Bulletproof Vest*. He spent six years at the *New York Times*. For more information, visit [kennethrosen.com](http://kennethrosen.com).