

"When you meet the friendliest people you have ever known, who introduce you to the most loving group of people you've ever encountered, and you find the leader to be the most inspired, caring, compassionate and understanding person you've ever met, and then you learn that the cause of the group is something you never dared hope could be accomplished, and all of this sounds too good to be true it probably is too good to be true!"

-- Jeannie Mills

**TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE:
RESISTING CULTS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL MANIPULATION**

Student Text

**A Lesson Plan for Middle Schools and High Schools
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Mind Control and Psychological Manipulation

"People don't join cults--they're aggressively recruited into them."

-- Former cult member

"Recruitment is a form of trespass. It is an invasive act. The victim of cult recruitment does not succumb -- the victim has been targeted and the recruiter takes careful aim, using charm, guile, and deceit."

-- Hope Evans, mother of cult member

Cults claim to offer contentment and fulfillment. They can appeal to people who

- Are lonely and/or seeking attention.
- Are in a normal but often difficult transitional stage of life
- Have suffered a recent loss through death or ending of an important relationship
- Want to be part of a caring community
- Are searching for meaning and purpose in their lives or a transcendent experience
- Are frightened of the uncertainty in life today and of facing a difficult economy
- Are idealistic and want to improve the world
- Want absolute, instant answers to life's complicated problems and ultimate questions
- Want to find a loving family in a time of breakdown of traditional family structure (some groups talk about themselves as "The Family" and the leaders as "True Parents" or "Mother" and "Father")
- Are attracted by a sense of daring and adventure
- Are disillusioned with our political system and want to find another way to change the world

But experts and former cult members say people don't join cults just because they're unhappy or searching for something. While those may be factors, they insist that people are manipulated, pressured, and deceived into going into cults.

Everyone is vulnerable because cult leaders use strong pressure to get people into the group and then use carefully designed methods of coercive persuasion or psychological manipulation to keep them in it. They use effective techniques to undermine and destroy the person's identity, self-confidence, self-image, and individuality and to bring him/her under the tight control of the group. Some of these specific techniques include

- Discouraging questions and critical thought
- Encouraging feelings of extreme guilt and remorse
- Using strong peer pressure, playing on member's desire to be loved and accepted (a technique known as love-bombing)