

# Shocking Mainstream Adolescents into Resisting Temptation

## S.M.A.R.T. TENTS

*"Kids today listen best to messages that are a little 'on the edge.' That's why having kids spend 24 hours in a life-like jail setting might just work to dissuade them from a life of crime and drug use."*

**Sheriff Joe Arpaio**  
*Maricopa County, Arizona*

At first it seemed a bit too risky even to Sheriff Joe Arpaio who is used to taking risks all the time.

But this was a risk having to do with young kids. How would they react to spending 24 hours "locked up" in a very real and life-like jail? How would they react to being treated like inmates? How would parents and teachers and the community at large react?

Arpaio's concerns were soon laid to rest by a creative program model put together by his staff which convinced him that S.M.A.R.T. Tents may be a way to slow down the upward spiral of juvenile crime.

When Sheriff's personnel went to the local school districts and pitched the idea to teachers and principals, response was so good that construction of S.M.A.R.T. Tents began immediately.

Twelve army surplus tents were erected on an asphalt surface about 50 yards from the real Tent City.

A ten foot high fence surrounds the S.M.A.R.T Tent compound and is covered with jungle-like mesh to keep the kids out of sight and sound of inmates incarcerated nearby.

Each tent is equipped with ten bunk beds, an electric fan, and lights.

Two larger tents are equipped with seating for up to 220, a television and VCR and a microphone system.

There are a number of portable toilets and a portable sink. There are also a number of Cambro units for any extra water that might be needed.

Kids from the seventh and eighth grades are bussed to S.M.A.R.T. Tents on Friday afternoons by the school districts or Sheriff's personnel. They are greeted by detention officers and from the start are treated just like inmates: No talking; boys and girls are divided into separate groups; each is told to put on the inmate uniform (black & white striped); they eat what the inmates eat while the staff eats pizza; they sleep like real inmates do with one blanket and no pillow. They are instructed about what life in jail is really like; they talk with real-life drug addicts about drugs and the life of crime that came from being a user.

They hear from Sheriff Arpaio, who tells them how tough life in his jails can be.

They talk about alcohol use and cigarette smoking. If any child misbehaves, s/he is even put on a chain gang and made to clean inside the S.M.A.R.T. Tents compound. Videos about jail life and drug use are shown and discussed in a frank and detailed manner--all of this and more is done in an environment that is tough and much harsher than the classroom or even playground.

Reports from the young students, teachers and parents who have experienced the program are excellent. Nearly every one of the children who so far have participated have written that the experience was "awful" and that jail is someplace to which they will avoid ever going.

Arpaio admits it will be hard to determine whether or not S.M.A.R.T. Tents actually reduces the number of kids who turn to a life of drugs and crime.

"Given what's going on with our young people today," Arpaio says, "we've got to try to impress upon them that crime and jail or prison life is the worst possible future for them. I believe this program may help to do that."