**A Parent's Guide to Drug Abuse**

This is a guide for parents. One of the most effective ways parents can prepare themselves to combat drugs is by learning about drugs and drug abuse. Whether it's the latest street lingo or a list of signs that your child is using drugs, this is your one stop source for information that could save your child's life.

In these days kids are experimenting with a wide variety of drugs. While most people don't associate cigarettes with drugs, surveys as well as our own residents in Teen Challenge report that nearly all people who have used drugs started smoking cigarettes as youngsters before they first experimented with drugs.

"No step on this path is inevitable, but this 'gateway' principle makes clear that the best way to end new addictions among the young is by drawing a line on the abstinence side of marijuana use, underage smoking and drinking," the report said. This is not to say that everyone who smokes cigarettes today uses drugs or used to use drugs. But when children begin to smoke, this is an early sign of rebellious behavior -- especially if your family does not smoke cigarettes.

If you discover that your child is smoking cigarettes, you have to ask yourself - why? If your child is smoking, his friends probably do also. The most common reason a child smokes is to feel "cool" or to be accepted by his friends. According to those who began using drugs as teenagers, the groups of kids at schools who smoked were also the ones most likely to use drugs and alcohol. We can try to deny it and say, "but Johnny's not a bad kid." But the reality of the situation is that those kids that smoke cigarettes are more likely to get into other kinds of trouble as opposed to those groups of kids that have other kinds of activities that are wholesome and that do not include smoking cigarettes.

Children will usually begin experimenting with drugs that don't seem dangerous to them, such as alcohol and marijuana. But once the thrill of these drugs wears off, they will often graduate to drugs like speed, LSD, and PCP. Later on, as experimentation turns into addiction, kids may turn to cocaine and heroin. Always be on the lookout for obvious signs that your child is using drugs. When being smoked, marijuana has a very distinct odor and kids will often burn lots of incense to cover up the smell. Often after smoking marijuana kids will go on an eating binge. Drugs such as speed will cause your child to appear very hyperactive and to stop eating and sleeping for long periods of time. If your child seems to be losing a lot of weight and is looking skinny or emaciated, there is a strong possibility that he or she might be using speed or cocaine.

When confronted about drugs many kids will say, "I'm just smoking a little pot (marijuana)." But if you see drastic physical changes such as: extreme weight loss or extreme changes in sleep patterns (too much or too little sleep), these are signs that your son or daughter is using much stronger drugs than marijuana. Marijuana will cause some tiredness but not to extremes as the harder drugs will.

 ***Some Common Signs That Your Child is Using Drugs or Alcohol***When children start using drugs they usually exhibit many different signs that parents need to watch out for. Unfortunately, many parents often write-off these signs as normal adolescent behavior and as a result they don't realize that their child is into drugs until it is too late. So how can you as a parent know for sure whether or not your child is in danger of falling into drugs? Simple ... by understanding that every child is in danger of this.

The parent who says "not my kid" is the same parent who will miss all the signs that their child has started experimenting with drugs. Often they will stay in this state of denial till their son or daughter is arrested or overdoses -- and by then it is too late. So what should you as parents be looking for as signs that your child is experimenting with drugs or alcohol?

***Dramatic changes in style of clothes, hair, and music***These outward signs of rebellion should be obvious to a parent. Has your child started listening to radically different music such as heavy metal or punk rock? Is your kid coloring their hair some weird color just to fit in? Is your child dressing down to fit in with friends at school? All of these are outward signs that your child is succumbing to peer pressure and all these should serve as warning signs to you that your child is in danger of falling into the same kind of peer pressure when it comes to drugs.
 ***Hanging out with a bad crowd***Your child might try and tell you that his/her friends are cool kids. But you need to take a close look at the kinds of kids your child is hanging out with. Chances are the way these friends behave is the way your child behaves when you're not around. Do some of your child's friends smoke cigarettes? If so, odds are your child is smoking too. Your child's friends are like a mirror for your son or daughter -- they look at themselves in that mirror and try to conform to what they see there. One of the best ways to get a good idea of what your child is like is to look at their closest friends.

***Tardiness and/or truancies***You need to stay in touch with your child's school. Never assume that his/her school will be in touch with you if there is a problem. If your child is getting into drugs, odds are he/she will start ditching class from time to time. Kids who do this tend to take off during the middle of school and get stoned somewhere near the campus. Don't assume that their school will let you know about this kind of behavior. And you need to realize, kids are great at covering this kind of behavior up. Kids know how to forge their parent's signature -- no joke. Call your child's school from time to time and ask about your child attendance record. You need to take the initiative here!

***Isolating from family***Does your child act distant? When you ask your child what he/she has been up to, does your child give some vague reply? Does you child want to eat in their room all the time instead of with the family? Children are smart - they know that the easiest lie to tell is the one they can avoid having to tell. If you child doesn't tell you what he/she has been up to, there's a good chance your child is hiding something.

***Changes in attitude and personality***Does it seem like your child is suddenly a completely different person with a new personality that you don't like one bit? Has your child suddenly developed a tough guy/girl attitude? If your child is experimenting with drugs, there's a good chance you'll be seeing these kinds of attitude changes. Often parents just see this as normal teenage behavior and write it off. Don't make this mistake . . . otherwise you might overlook one of the most obvious signs of your child's drug problem.

***Changes in sleep patterns***These kinds of changes should be fairly obvious. Does your child stay up late (or even all night) frequently, refusing to get up in the morning at a decent time. Does your child sleep way too much or way too little. If your child isn't sleeping much, there's a good chance he/she is using. This is a frequent effect of this kind of stimulant.

Excessive use of foul or obscene language has your child suddenly developed a filthy mouth? This might indicate that your child is giving into peer pressure from their friends and should be a warning sign to you. If your child is trying to fit in with their friends by cussing, sooner or later your child will probably look for other ways to gain acceptance in his/her peer group. One of these ways is an often drug.

***Eating way too much or way too little***Here's another obvious sign of drug experimentation that is often overlooked as normal teenage behavior. Does your child come home in the afternoon after hanging out with friends and devour everything in the refrigerator? If your child were smoking pot with his/her friends, it wouldn't be unusual for your child to eat a bit more food than normal. Does your child skip quite a few consecutive meals, and then speed use is a possibility.

***Paranoia - everyone is out to get me***Does your son or daughter treat everybody as if they were the enemy? Do they tend to express the idea that everybody is out to get them? Do they seem overly paranoid to you?

***What Parents Can Do***

If you have found out for sure that your child is experimenting with drugs and alcohol, what you do next is a matter of utmost importance. Some parents shrug drug experimentation off as a phase a child goes through as they grow up. Other parents just want to deny the problem and hope it will go away on its own. But the truth is you can't ignore your child's drug problem...it will not go away on its own, it will only get worse! Here are some suggestions on what you can do as parents if your child is using drugs or alcohol.

You need to find out what kinds of drug your child is experimenting with. Often children will claim they are only smoking marijuana when they are really using other drugs also. Take the time to investigate matters for yourself, and find out what's really going on.

Begin to scrutinize your child's choice of friends. If your son or daughter is experimenting with drugs, some of his or her friends are also involved. It is important to find out which of these friends are involved in this experimentation and get your child away from these influences. This is one of the most difficult things to accomplish, but it is also one of the most necessary. Bad friends corrupt good morals. Of those that leave Teen Challenge and end up back on drugs, one of the most common reasons is that they went back to the same old friends and environment where they used drugs before. Those that stay clean invariably find a new set of friends that encourage and support good values and wholesome fun that does not include drugs and alcohol.

If possible get your kids involved in church activities. It is very important not only to get your children away from kids who are bad influences on them, but also to get them around people who will have a positive impact on their life. Churches center many of their activities around the family and are often overlooked as a source for help. Students who have completed the Teen Challenge program and continue to stay off drugs often site church activities as one reason that they are able to "stay clean."

Get involved in your kids life. Today's fast-paced world has taken its toll on parenting. Many parents idea of spending time with their children is sitting down and spending an hour or two watching television with them.

That is not the kind of involvement your child needs! Spend quality time with your son or daughter...helping them with their homework or just sitting down each day and talking about what your child did that day. Also take the time to personally attend their activities with them. Show your children that you care about them by doing things with them. This also gives you an opportunity to see who their friends are and how they act when they are together.

Set standards for your child. Let him or her know what you expect of them around the house, what their chores are and the penalty for not doing them. Also set standards for your child at school.

Tell you child what kind of grades you expect him to achieve. And finally, give your child standards for behavior. Your child needs to know that using drugs and alcohol is unacceptable behavior. Don't be afraid to deal with your child using tough love if he or she continues to experiment with drugs or alcohol. The alternatives are much worse!

Seek help from people who understand what you are going through. The pastor at the church your family attends is one person you can talk to about what your child is going through. Teen Challenge is another alternative for help. Our centers have been helping people with drug and alcohol problems for over 50 years.

**A Tip Sheet for Parents**

Parents, you can provide good models for your children by what you do and what you avoid doing.

Show that you value your freedom to think and act independently -- you don't do something because everyone is doing it. This helps your children see that unwanted peer pressure could be rejected.

Be consistent in your words and actions. For example, a phone call interrupts your dinner and you say, "Tell them I'm not home yet." The message your children hear is that it's okay to be dishonest for your own convenience. Demonstrate your respect for your children's lives and show concern by being a good listener.

Be sincere, ask questions, and use a touch or a look for encouragement.

Be cautious in using prescription or over-the-counter medicines as a quick fix for pain or stress. Your example can help counter the media messages that chemicals can cure discomfort.

Be aware of how your own use of alcohol can influence children. Your children will notice how much you drink and why. Avoid using excuses for drinking, like having a rough day. Your drinking behavior tends to be the drinking behavior your children will have when they grow up.

Talk honestly about stress and conflict in your own life. Children need to know that such struggles are a normal part of life. They have a good model when they see that you are coping with problems without relying on alcohol and other drugs.

If you are trying to change something in your behavior -- such as quitting smoking or losing weight -- be willing to talk about what works and what doesn't. Show that spending time with your children is something you value and look forward to. If you are too tired or too busy, they're likely to imitate your behavior.

Accept the role of parent as your responsibility -- let someone else be their friend. Make parenting a priority. Be there! Remember that teenagers need parental supervision as much as toddlers do. It's just a different kind. Know that your children are never too big for a hug, even when they are grown.

**Are You Helping or Hurting?**

***Pain Can Motivate Change***

Many godly parents have prayed and fasted for their child, yet they watch painfully as their child continues down a path of rebellion and destruction. One mother said,” I pray for my children, but why is God so slow to answer?"

So what can parents or grandparents do to help their loved ones? Stop enabling!

***Enabling - Offering the Wrong Kind of Help.***

Enabling is rescuing your loved ones so that they do not experience the painful consequences of their irresponsible decisions. Enabling is anything that stands in the way of persons experiencing the natural consequences of their own behavior. Tracy, the young mother of two boys, has mastered the art of manipulating her family into enabling her behavior.

Often arrested on drug charges, she would say to her parents, "Do you want to see the mother of your grandchildren locked up in jail?" The last time it happened, the parents were planning to mortgage their home so they could afford the bail payment.

Galatians 6:7-8 speaks to Christians about this with a simple but blunt truth. "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from that Spirit will reap eternal life."(NIV) God's Word is specific. Christians - don't be deceived! Bad actions have painful consequences, even when our children or loved ones are involved. Thankfully, God can use those consequences for His purposes - if we don't get in His way.

***When you stop enabling, get ready for more trouble!***

When you stop offering the wrong kind of help, your loved ones may get very angry with you – and for a "good" reason. You’ve stopped rescuing them. Now they are beginning to feel the painful consequences of their irresponsible decisions. Just before mortgaging their home, Tracy’s parents were persuaded to stop enabling her. They let her stay in jail for almost a year - feeling the full impact of her irresponsible behavior. Angry and frustrated, Tracy accused them of not loving her.

But while she was in jail, the drugs cleared out of Tracy’s system and she began to think clearly again. She joined a Bible study, became a Christian and entered Teen Challenge when she was released. When you make a decision to stop enabling, like Tracy’s parents did, you must stand on the facts - especially if you have a tender heart. You must continue to rehearse the fact of how you’re loved one’s actions are destroying his or her life - and how enabling this to continue is the worst thing you could do.

***God is a loving Father - don’t be afraid to trust Him.***

When you stop enabling your loved one, he or she may go further down the path of destruction.

You may inwardly think, "I can’t bear to see my daughter in such pain and danger." Or, "My son might get killed! And then I would have his death on my hands. I can’t let that happen!" But whatever happens, do not be afraid to trust God. Place your hope in the story of the Prodigal

Son recorded in Luke 15.

This father did not enable his son. He allowed him to leave home, knowing the son would soon waste his inheritance. Before long, the rebellious young man had lost everything - and he ended up in a pigpen, eating the food the pigs didn’t want. But all alone in the pigpen, the Bible says, "He came to his senses." The young man realized that even the hired men at his father’s household ate better than he did! And the son resolved to go and seek his father’s forgiveness. When he finally meets his father again, the son’s true repentance is seen in his words: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you." (Verse 21) He takes personal responsibility for his actions. It’s time for joyful peace and a celebration!

***Learning to be at peace with God.***

Just like the Prodigal Son’s father, you can rest in the peace that God has the address of your loved ones, no matter how deep they are in sin. His love far surpasses your love. He knows what will work best to bring your loved ones to that point of change. You’ve got to trust God – even when things are going from bad to worse. Stop offering the wrong kind of help. Stop feeding the problem.

Stop being deceived. Trust Him. Jesus is ready to help us offer the right kind of help. He promises to give us wisdom to make the difficult decisions. He also stands ready and waiting with open arms to help our loved ones who really need His help. Look to Him today for guidance on how best to help those you love.

***Six Characteristics of an Enabler***

They work for self-improvement. "If I were a better parent/grandparent/friend, my loved one wouldn't be doing this."

They change the environment to accommodate the person with the problem. "Let’s change schools and get our child away from those troublemakers."

They take on the whole world in defense of a loved one. "The whole legal system is corrupt, and my child/grandchild/friend is getting unjust treatment."

Their pain increases. Because the loved one is still acting irresponsibly, the enabler’s pain and frustration deepens.

Communications deteriorate. Because the issues are unresolved, defenses are high. Both the enabler and the loved one are often deluded about reality.

Enabling is habit-forming. The enabler keeps offering the same kind of help. Sometimes the enabler derives such deep satisfaction from "rescuing" someone that he or she never assesses whether the assistance is helping or hurting the loved one.

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