

A Parent's Guide to Adolescent Substance Abuse Prevention and Recovery

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide parents with a general understanding of substance abuse and addictions in our adolescent population. We will cover prevention strategies briefly, identifying a possible addiction, intervention, and finally treatment. This guide is not meant to be your only resource, but to help you understand your resources and how to utilize them appropriately.

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“But the end *and* culmination of all things have now come near; keep sound minded *and* self-restrained and alert therefore for [the practice of] prayer.” (1 Peter 4:7, Amplified Bible, Classic Edition) This verse is the basis of this manual of substance abuse prevention and recovery. There are different theories among theologians as to what the end refers to, but the part we are going to focus on is keeping sound minded and self-restrained. To be sound minded one cannot be under the influence of any substances. We must practice self-restraint to keep from using, and that same restraint can be used in teaching our youth to help prevent addictions.

Substance abuse is every growing epidemic in our country. It does not only affect the inner city kids, but suburbia, and even in the rural areas. Being in the Midwest, we see the effects of drug abuse at a rapid rate. According to an article that appeared in the Journal of At-Risk Issues, “there is a significant health concern for rural educators over the use of legal and illegal drugs. There have been multiple studies published that have shown the risk of abuse of legal and illicit substances is higher in the rural areas of the US when compared to urban or suburban areas.” (Williams Jr., Barnes, Holman, & Hunt, 2014)

Before we can discuss ways to prevent abuse, we must first understand why the abuse may occur. There are numerous types of drugs that our youth can come in contact with, still though marijuana is the number one choice followed by methamphetamines. According to Nora Volkow in a paper, she wrote for the National Institute on Drug Abuse; there are five main reasons adolescents choose to do drugs. To fit in, to feel good, to feel better, to do better, and to experiment.(Volkow, 2014)

First of the main reasons drugs are abused is simply to fit in. These teens are using substances because “they feel others are doing it, or they think others are doing it and they fear not being accepted in a social circle that includes drug-using peers.”(Volkow, 2014) Secondly, teens will often use drugs in hopes to feel good, the change in the chemistry of the brain when taking drugs, causes a euphoric feeling, or that “high” feeling, to feel good should not be confused with to feel better. “Some adolescents suffer from depression, social anxiety, stress-related disorders, and physical pain. Using drugs may be an attempt to lessen these feelings of distress.” (NIDA, 2014 p.10) In this ever growing and competitive society we all live in now, adolescents are pressured more than ever to excel in sports and academics. Some teens will turn to substances to chemically attempt to improve or enhance their performance. Finally, many youths just want to experiment, the part of the brain that does reward/risk assessment has not fully developed, so youth often are looking to take chances and do things they perceive as daring or thrilling.

Parents, you should know some of the classic signs that your child has already started using drugs. Has there been a change in their group of friends? How about grooming are they still taking the effort to look decent? Are their grades dropping off, or missing and skipping school? Are they eating differently? How about different sleep patterns? Have they withdrawn from the family and are those intimate relationships starting to deteriorate? If you see any of these signs, you may want to have a talk with your youth and rule out other issues that may be happening first.(Volkow, 2014)

Now we will start getting into the preventative aspects of addictions. “ Based on this prevention framework, scholars have discussed two prominent approaches: (a) school-based prevention programming, and (b) random drug testing, to prevent and reduce substance use.”

(Tze, Li, & Pei, 2012 p.2) We will attempt to look at both, and let you decide on what will work best for you.

The educational approach traditionally is made through the education system, but these same principles. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse through an educational approach which focuses on empowering adolescents, so that they will make informed decisions so that they will pursue a healthier lifestyle. This method will in all likelihood reduce the amount of substance abuse. This process is geared to assist our youth in decision-making skills so that they will make healthy and good decisions that are good for both personal growth and spiritual development. There are many resources available for helping to educate our youth against drug abuse. The key is to Educate adolescents about the effects and consequences of drug addiction, help them to develop their refusal skills to protect themselves in problematic situations and to teach them what is needed to function in social situations and to self-manage their skills to reduce substance abuse.

The other approach to preventing drug abuse is deterrent methods. The restraint method's hard to do in a home setting. It is primarily employed in facilities such as schools; they include zero tolerance policies, random drug testing, the primary goal is to remind the youth that there is no leniency on substance abuse. For the sake of this manual, we will be focusing on education methods as well as detection and intervention.

Dr. Sam Williams stated in an article for LifeWay “If addiction is disordered, sinful, idolatrous worship then what would the solution be?”(Williams, n.d.) The four steps that Dr. Williams speaks of include, detection and confirmation, loving confrontation, triage, and counseling.

If one of our teens is suspected of having an addiction, then the loving families with the help of your pastor can take a closer look to help the adolescent instead of ignoring and hoping the problem goes away. This intervention is the first step detection and confirmation. In Galatians 6:1-2 it states “Brothers, if someone is caught in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual should restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves, so you also won’t be tempted. 2 Carry one another's burdened; in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:1-2, Holman Christian Standard Bible) We are commanded by Scripture to confront those that are falling out of the fold. We as parents must directly and gently address those who are overtaken by life-dominating sin. All that is needed for this step is a few caring, loving family members, some friends, and church leaders all that love the person who is in trouble.

Now that we have identified the potential substance abuse, and had our intervention, now is to begin to act upon and start helping bring our loved ones out of the addiction. Dependent on how severe the addiction, the type of dependency or how long the addiction has been taken place a radical intervention may be needed. This may require the use of a Christian residential treatment program which may take anywhere from 30 days to 6 months to complete dependent on the program.

Finally, we need to get our youth into counseling, in these counseling sessions several things need to be addressed. “In a Christian addiction treatment environment need to embrace all that theology and science have to offer to provide the best care possible for those suffering from addiction.” (Pittman & Scott, 2002 p.210) The adolescent will need to face his addiction by knowing how their addiction affects their daily life. They will need to make a commitment to change, and share this responsibility with accountability or prayer partner. A relapse prevention

plans need to be created; this plan includes ways of escape, identifying and building boundaries. Our youth need to be taught the spiritual truths and disciplines.

In an article written for Focus on the Family, they state “The virtue of self-control is critical for a disciple of Christ.” (Waliszewski, Eaton, & Holz, 2010) and “God — not drugs — can be trusted to see us through the pain of life.” (Waliszewski et al., 2010) Self-control is paramount in beating addiction; we need to learn to teach our youth to put all of their faith in Christ.

The Bible is full of instructions that teach us how to fight our addictions in Ephesians 6, primarily in these verses “Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by His vast strength. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the tactics of the Devil. 12 For our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens.” (Ephesians 6:10-12, Holman Christian Standard Bible) These are the biblical truths that our youth need to be taught and told about. These truths and principles are the cornerstones of beating addiction with a Christ-centered attitude.

The last two aspects of counseling we are going to discuss are, deception and change. The Bible warns us in 1 Timothy about deception. “Now the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will depart from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons, 2 through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared.” (1 Timothy 4:1-2, Holman Christian Standard Bible) We must draw our youth closer to us so that they do not depart from the faith; they need help in understanding the importance of honesty, and that deceit and lying are the work of the Devil.

As Christians, we need to instill a sense of purpose in our addicted youth. We must remind them that they need to avoid wrong behaviors of all kinds so that they may grow. By using addicting substances, we begin to lose our will to pursue God and his purpose for our lives. Throughout the Pauline Epistles, Paul tells the churches to be careful of the decisions they make, in Ephesians just before Paul warns us not to get drunk it states. "Pay careful attention, then, to how you walk—not as unwise people but as wise— 16 making the most of the time,[a] because the days are evil. 17 So don't be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.

We must avoid all types of corrupt practices to develop. In Ephesians 5:15-17 Paul instructs the church of Ephesus to be careful about the decisions they make. This scripture is just before his instructions to not be drunkards. "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is." (Ephesians 5:15-17 HCSB). "Drug use numbs our will to pursue God and His purposes for our lives."(Waliszewski, Eaton, & Holz, 2010) Relapses happen it is often called part of the path to recovery, I believe that recovery does not require a relapse to occur, but it is very likely that it will. If your teenage child does have a relapse, do not be discouraged. According to Dr. Williams, a writer for LifeWay website, relapses which are very common and may people who eventually defeat their addictions will relapse several times before overcoming their addictions.(Williams, n.d.) Be there for them, offer support, show empathy for the relapse, and help them get back on the road to recovery. Getting mad and yelling is only going to push your teenage child back into the cycle of addiction majority of the time.

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