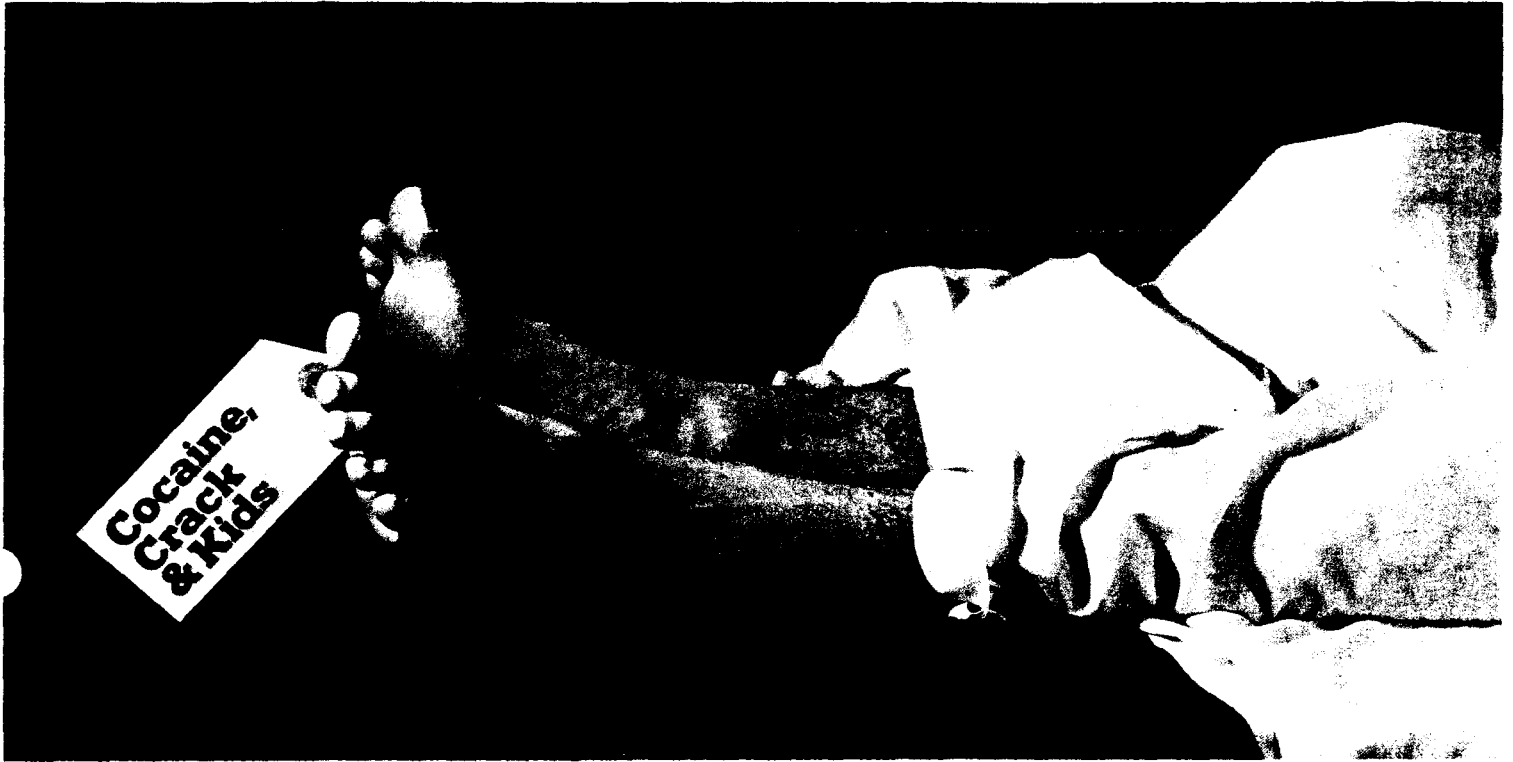


EPIDEMIC . . .

No. 10 Straight talk about kids, drugs and families from The Straight Foundation



It's hard not to know about "crack." It's the hottest drug to hit the streets in years. It's the high-seekers' answer to fast-food.

And "crack" or "rock" is the new bestseller for good reason: It's the quickest and best; it's the most potent, the most alluring, the most prevalent, the most attractive, the most affordable.

And, yet, it's the most expensive, the most destructive, the most crime-producing, the most deadly.

If basketball star Len Bias, 22, knew this when he used cocaine, he paid the price, the supreme price. And, if he hadn't known, his ignorance cost him his life. Just a few days later, the death of pro football's Don Rogers, 23, also cocaine-induced, made more news nationwide.

The pleasures and perils of cocaine have been known for years, so what's the big deal, what's so special about crack? First, it's easy to forget that crack is cocaine. Its users say its characteristics are that different.

Like "freebasing," crack is smoked. A simple solution, taking the explosion risk out of converting cocaine hydrochloride salt (the powder) into a smokable material, revolutionized the extremely addictive habit. Common baking soda and water are the tools of the revolution. The cocaine powder is mixed with the baking soda and water, creating a paste that is usually about 75% pure. Next, heat is used to quicken the paste's hardening, and the resultant soap-like material is cut into chips or bars. A small piece, often called a "quarter-rock," sells for about \$10-15, produces a very powerful high lasting 10-15 minutes and then causes a severe low or depression.

Even though crack can be made in any kitchen, most users choose to buy it already processed into the much more potent form which is inhaled. It is the smoking process that causes the dramatic high with crack. Because the drug is inhaled directly into the lungs, according to Nicholas Kozel, chief of the statistical and epidemiology branches of the National Institute on Drug Abuses, based in Rockville, MD, half of the body's circulatory system is bypassed (as opposed to snorting the powdery cocaine) and the drug reaches the brain in 4 to 6 seconds.

Through the nostrils, coke takes 10 times as long to work; and, even intravenously it does not act as rapidly or intensely as smoking the drug, according to a July 1986 report from the Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association.

"Crack is the most addictive drug known to man right now," says Arnold Washton, a psychopharmacologist at Fair Oaks Hospital in Summit, NJ. "It is almost instantaneously addictive, whereas if you snort coke it can take 2 to 5 years before addiction sets in.

"There is no such thing as the 'recreational use' of crack." And crime statistics from across the country prove this daily. The need for crack – the need for cash.

Especially in the big cities – Los Angeles, New York and Miami lead the pack, police statistics show – "crack is unquestionably the major narcotics-related problem law enforcement agencies across the country are dealing with at the moment," says Fred Schneyer of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, based in Tallahassee.

(cont. on pg. 4)

Cocaine, Crack & Kids: A

Epidemic recently talked with 5 teenagers who are currently enrolled in the Straight program. All have had experiences with cocaine and crack, and all felt that the best deterrent against future use by other teenagers is straight talk about where it got them.

What are your experiences with cocaine and crack?

Bobby, 16: I got into cocaine mainly because I was going to a private school and got friendly with a guy whose dad had a lot of cocaine and other drugs around the house. I didn't do it consecutively for a long time, but I did it for a month or 2 and was doing a lot of it. My friend was stealing it from his dad. We were best friends. I remember being kicked out of school (I don't remember for what), and he was still in school, I broke into his house looking for any drugs I could find.

Did his dad know you were doing the coke?

He had suspicions and caught my friend a couple of times. He didn't give it to us – we had to steal it, just about every day. We were doing a lot of it – going to school high and shaky and speeded up. I got really paranoid and thought the police were after us and we were being watched – I don't know if this was from the drug or if it was real. I remember one night when I was home alone, doing some coke every 10 or 15 minutes, by myself – I just couldn't stop.

Janet, 16: I never did cocaine that much – mostly just crack. My friends only did crack because they spent all their money on it. I really didn't think I was addicted. But I'd sit and wait in the car while they broke into houses to get money for more crack. I was doing it 2 or 3 times a week – it was more fun than pot or any other drugs that were around.

Some older cousins came to visit, who were supposed to be straight, and my mom asked them to talk to me about all the trouble I was getting into. I'd spend the weekend with them – and they'd buy crack – they'd buy a lot because they had more money than my other friends. I'd do so much that I couldn't move; they'd have to carry me into the house. I'd wake up the next morning still high from it. I got real paranoid. I could never be alone, even for a minute or 2. But the worst time ever was when I came down off crack. Coming down you feel real bad – crack makes everything seem 10 times worse. I was really depressed and shaking a lot. I never connected my moody feelings with the drug until I came into the program.

Doug, 17: I did a lot of cocaine and crack. I was living on my own and doing coke every day for 4 or 5 months. I was snorting coke, smoking crack and freebasing. I'd freebase out of my cigarettes – before school, at school, before practice. I was scared and paranoid the whole time. I was lonely and scared about what was happening to my body. Just before I came into the program I stayed up for 18 hours doing coke. I've tried to talk about this many times and the fear never goes away.

Had you heard about how bad coke and crack is before or during this time?

Yes, I was scared but didn't care. A lot of crack was around and my friends were doing it and I just didn't care. When I was coming down I just wanted more and more to feel better. While we were freebasing we'd talk about how bad it is and how addictive. But nothing mattered.

So you knew intellectually that it was bad for you, but you couldn't take that knowledge and apply it to yourself personally?

It's just like all the drugs I did – I knew they were bad but I still did them. My brother-in-law is a dealer and my sister would steal it from him to give to me to sell. Instead of selling it, I would do it. I once figured out that I would have spent \$16,000 in 3 months, if I had to buy it. I lost interest in my friends. I would stay up for 3 or 4 days doing coke. I'd go to school stoned and fall asleep during class. I quit my job. I'd go into the bathroom and throw up blood. I

started bleeding out of my nose, going into convulsions, and being really white. I'd even look in the mirror and tell myself out loud 'you're really a druggie'. Two days before I came into the program I overdosed and tried to commit suicide. I stuck a gun down my throat and wanted to pull the trigger, but couldn't.

Blood was coming down my face, I was sweating, I was hearing voices that weren't there – this was when I was coming down from coke. I was wrapped in a blanket and shaking, and having cramps all through my body. I was going through withdrawal.

I don't remember exactly what happened. I went to school and talked to my principal – told her I had a drug problem and needed help. She called my parents. When I reached out for help I weighed 120 lbs., had bags under my eyes and was a mess. It was like I was in a bubble – I was in my own world and scared to get in touch with anyone. I was on the planet Earth all by myself and no one else was there. It scares me a lot, even today.

Joan, 16: When I think about doing coke, I think about when I was 13 and doing a lot of speed. After a while the speed didn't work and a girlfriend gave me some coke. Then my dad left our house and took everything with him. I went to a party that night with an attitude that I just wanted to get really high. My druggie boyfriend had crystal (speed) and coke, and I liked the coke because it didn't burn like speed and didn't take as long. I was really scared because I knew what it could do to you, but I didn't care. We started doing a lot of it – my boyfriend was going broke buying it. I remember thinking in the back of my head 'wow, I'm really a high class druggie now, getting addicted to coke'. I was really screwed up, depressed and lonely.

One night I was so depressed I took 3 bottles of extra strength Tylenol and a bunch of other pills. I remember waking up in the hospital. The doctor told me I had taken a lethal dose and was lucky my mom had found me. A month later I started doing it again – freebasing for the first time. One night I noticed a big lump on my back. I was rushed to the hospital and operated on and had 2 tumors removed. The tumors were caused from impurities in the coke which built up in my blood and got infected. I am 5'7½" and was down to 90 lbs. My mom gave me a chance to stop on my own, but a month later I was doing it again. Coke made me feel really cool, when I wasn't coming down. I guessed I looked at it as a really glamorous drug – it had this Las Vegas flair to it. I come from a small town in Oklahoma and this was really exciting.

Steve, 17: I'd been through treatment and was straight for 4 years. I started getting high again and decided that coke wouldn't be as bad as the hallucinogens (acid) I had been doing before. I started out drinking and 4 days later tried crack. I had a lot of bad feelings about doing drugs again and losing my sobriety – I knew a lot about being chemically dependent. I couldn't get enough crack – we'd seem to run out so quick. It was cheap, at first, but soon all of my money was being spent on coke and crack. I was really scared and paranoid – the dealers all carried guns and I couldn't believe I was back in this type of situation. But I was willing to risk it because I wanted the drug.

You'd been through treatment, had all this knowledge about chemical dependency and what it could do to you – and it still made no difference?

At first it made a difference, but then I lost control again. It was just like before, but worse.

You thought cocaine would be easier to control than acid?

Yes, I thought coke was more glamorous and wouldn't be so bad – but it ended up a lot worse. I would get it from people who would kill you if you didn't give them enough money. I'd been doing drugs for about a month. I'd lost a lot of weight, looked really bad, lost all my friends, was broke and in debt and knew I needed to quit. I was going to, when some people came over with a lot of coke. We wound up doing it all – we did it for hours, really fast, back and forth. I started shaking and panicking because I thought we were running out. I was really desperate and couldn't control

Interview

wanting it. I had a habit – went through withdrawal, got sick, didn't eat for 3 days. I'd get angry and bored and burn myself on my arms. Emotionally I was dead. Physically I was in a lot of pain. I put myself back into treatment 3 days later.

It happened so quick – it seemed like overnight. I started doing drugs and, bang, I had nothing – no money, was missing car payments, failed my session in college. My priorities made a 180 degree turnaround, focused in the opposite direction. I was into running and lifting weights, and just quit. I just quit everything and didn't care anymore.

If you could say one thing to a parent or teenager about cocaine and crack, what would it be? What's your advice?

Steve: I think the best thing would be to tell what it's done to me, because nothing good ever comes from it. Just look at the people who are doing it, then at the people who aren't. It's bad stuff. To parents, I'd tell them to watch for the warning signs – losing weight, having no money, change in attitude – things like that.

Doug: I'd just tell them how it's going to screw you up. The high was good for awhile, but you don't really know how it's affecting you until you come down. It really screwed me up and it will to you too.

Janet: One thing always leads to another. You start with a little but you always lose control. The good feelings you get from it

don't last – it's only covering up bad feelings. It's not worth it. To parents – know your kid, and don't give up. I think if my mom had more courage she would have put me in treatment sooner – you have to be strong. A lot of parents are really into denial and will just give up on their kids.

Joan: I'd take the time to share with a teenager about where it got me – how I almost killed myself. And how you can have your fun with it but then you have to be prepared to get straight or die.

Bobby: I was a walking zombie – I was slowly committing suicide. I was a 15 year old little boy doing coke and acid – once the drugs had me they didn't let go until I came into treatment. I think it takes a treatment program and peer pressure to get you off – it's got a grip on you and you need a lot of support and help to get off.

Joan: Something else for a parent – denial is the number one killer of druggies, after the drugs. It takes so little time. If you have suspicions, get a urine analysis done. If you have any doubts, do it, because the thing you're most scared of is finding out that it's true. When I came into treatment I felt so relieved to be away from drugs.

Steve: I would tell them that it's forever – once it's got you it grabs you forever. It will tear you apart – it's inevitable.

Our generation is going to be running the country soon and if we're all wired up on crack and cocaine it's going to be kind of difficult. If it can destroy people, why can't it destroy a whole country or society? Drugs are all bad but cocaine and crack seem to be worse. You fall in love with it and it destroys you. I've never seen anyone do it just once.

PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT THE STRAIGHT FOUNDATION, INC.

William D. Oliver, Executive Director

Healthy organizations, like healthy people, grow and change. Indeed, the ability to manage this growth is the greatest challenge facing the leadership of any organization. We have seen this time and again in business, government, churches and indeed in families and certainly in children. The ability to recognize and respond to the need for appropriate change is the foundation of the present and the launching pad for the future.

STRAIGHT has changed because STRAIGHT has grown. Only ten years ago, it was a very small, local attempt to do something about the local problem of drug-using children in St. Petersburg, Florida. No one realized that STRAIGHT would touch so directly the cancer that was beginning to eat away at the vitality of this great nation – a generation of children sinking in a swamp of mind-altering chemicals.

As Dr. Robert Dupont put it, "I have watched STRAIGHT grow from the fine local program of ten years ago, to the controversial program of five years ago, to the great national program of today."

Our efforts have attracted worldwide attention. In a three-month period alone, we have been visited by the First Lady of the United States, the Princess of Wales, the First Lady of Ecuador, the President of Variety Clubs International (the largest children's charity in the world), and the Vice President of Columbia. We have been featured on all three television network's news magazines. We had a two hour T.V. movie written about our program featured on CBS. We have had articles written about us in "Reader's Digest" and the "Ladies' Home Journal."

In the last twelve months, we have opened new family treatment centers in Boston, Detroit, and Orlando. We are about to open a new center in Dallas, Texas. Additionally, we have been asked to open centers as soon as possible in Chicago, St. Louis, New York, Los Angeles, Seattle, and Salt Lake City.

The demand is great because the problem is great. The most recent studies confirm that one out of every ten teenagers in America is fully addicted to alcohol and drugs. A recent government study projects that unless the trend turns quickly, one out of every four children will go through a drug or alcohol treatment program before reaching the age of twenty-one.

To put the problem further in perspective, the polio epidemic of 1953 saw 29 of every 100,000 children contract the disease. Today, 10,000 of every 100,000 adolescents have the disease of chemical dependency, addiction to drugs and alcohol. Chemical dependency is far deadlier and far more crippling than polio. If this were polio, we would be in a state of national emergency.

STRAIGHT, when it began in 1976, was a voice crying in the wilderness. Today, we are at the forefront of a national outcry.

But it is not enough. We have learned painfully how to treat the disease. We have not learned how to prevent it. If we are to live up to our calling, we must continue to expand efforts in treatment and at the same time, marshal resources from across America to prevent the problem. The treatment has a built-in base which we must use to attack the root of the problem so that we may one day be able to see America's young people make the passage into adulthood with clear eyes and a clear mind.

As a result of the growth of STRAIGHT, the scope of the problem, the expanding demands for treatment, and the opportunity to make even more inroads into prevention, assessment, intervention, and national awareness, we have decided to specialize our activities. We have, therefore, divested ourselves of the operations of the treatment centers previously under our direction. The ownership and operation of the centers has been turned over to a newly created specialized organization whose sole purpose is the effective administration and operation of alcohol and drug treatment centers for adolescents. This new organization will take the name STRAIGHT, INC.

The original organization which was known as STRAIGHT, INC. has been renamed THE STRAIGHT FOUNDATION, INC. to reflect more accurately its role in marshalling resources to broaden the fight against the epidemic of drug and alcohol use by young people.

Under its revised charter, THE STRAIGHT FOUNDATION, INC. will serve to marshal resources, both human and financial, to support other independent efforts dedicated to the creation of a national awareness of the adolescent drug problem, prevention, assessment, early intervention, diagnosis, and treatment of drug-using young people and their families.

In addition to conducting fund raising on a national basis, THE STRAIGHT FOUNDATION, INC. will establish, encourage and support local chapters in cities across America so that individual communities will have a vehicle to undertake tailored strategies unique to that communities' needs and objectives.

We have not taken this step lightly. We recognize fully that if the tide of the drug epidemic is not turned within this generation of children, the American dream will become the American nightmare.

We must move from the denial of "not my kid" to the commitment of "not my country." In a nutshell, that is our new mission. Together, we will fulfill it. We have no choice!



Cocaine, Crack & Kids *(cont. from pg. 1)*

John Sutton, deputy chief of the cocaine investigations division of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, recently told a news conference that, according to recent estimates, the crack problem "has reached epidemic proportions" in about 20 major U.S. cities.

According to another Florida official fast-becoming an expert on crack, State Attorney Janet Reno of Dade County, the problem is "critical. Cocaine causes death and it causes crimes." "Crack houses" — the opium dens of the '80s — are entrenched in those 20 major U.S. cities and can't be far behind in the smaller cities and towns across America.

Law enforcement officials say most of the crack in the country is being processed in small-scale "mom-and-pop" operations. At a single location, cocaine powder often is made into crack, sold and consumed . . . all under the protection of the confines of the crack house. Dade County (Fla.) police estimate 700 crack houses in operation there alone. Still in Florida, Robert Dempsey, law enforcement commissioner, noted that 1985's "dramatic" increase in crime (an unexpected 14%) paralleled the introduction of crack into the state. "The addict who is caught in this terrible mire is out there constantly trying to replenish his funds because he lives for only one thing — to get that crack," Dempsey said. "Drug abusers are always searching for the ultimate high, and they may be very close to it with crack," said Lt. Joseph Lisi of the New York City Police Department.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, in 1985 a total of 17% of high school students surveyed said they had tried cocaine at least once; in 1976, less than 10% said they have ever used the drug.

"The problem with crack is trying it once is obviously too much," said Dr. Charles Schuster, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

If you're worried about your child being on drugs, there's a very good chance they are. Parental denial is very powerful; for a parent to be worried, the child's behavior has become so erratic that reality is forcing itself through the wall of denial. Remember that you, as a parent, are only seeing the tip of the iceberg. Drugs, and crack in particular, consume time and money, as they consume the person. How is your child using his time and money? If you don't know, or can't find out, chances are there's a problem. Telling a crack user to just say 'no' simply won't work. If your child is using crack, he or she needs help. As one former teenage crack user says elsewhere in this issue, "denial is the number one killer of druggies, after the drugs . . . the thing you're most scared of is finding out that it's true."

For past issues of EPIDEMIC, including ones dealing with denial and prevention, and to receive future issues, please contact The Straight Foundation at (813) 576-7563.

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THE STRAIGHT FOUNDATION

Dear friend,

In the recent Straight survey, we have found four times as many kids are using cocaine as just two years ago.

Here is one more reason we so urgently need your help today!

Bill Oliver