

## DO AS I SAY.....NOT AS I DID - YESTERDAY'S DRUG USERS FACE OWN CHILDREN'S QUESTION

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Kevin, a former free spirit of the '60s, has a confession to make to his 12-year-old son, but he hopes to put off the day of destiny a little longer.

Every time Kevin warns son Andy of the dangers of drugs, the coat-and- tie yuppie is bracing for the possible query: Dad, did you ever use drugs?

"It's a difficult position to be in, to tell your kid, 'Do as I say, not as I used to do,' " said Kevin, a successful Palm Beach County business consultant who was a casual marijuana smoker in the late '60s and early '70s in college.

"If he asks, I'll tell him the truth, but I keep hoping the discussion can be delayed for a few years. I want to make sure he is mature enough to handle it and not see my actions as permissive."

More and more, yesterday's hippies are finding themselves confronted with the delicate task of warning their children about drugs when they, themselves, were once in a drug haze. A "very high percentage" of parents in their '30s and '40s have at least tried marijuana in their youth, one expert estimated.

While these parents might be tempted to lie about or soft pedal their drug use to their children, experts advise being as honest as possible. Nor should drug use be excusable in parents and inexcusable in children.

"One of the worst things parents can do is to drive certain issues underground, whether it be drugs or sex or religion, and make them sort of dark and forboding," said Ronald Brinn, a drug expert who operates a drug- rehabilitation program in Jamaica Queens, a New York City suburb and one of the highest drug-addiction areas in the nation. "You don't want your child to make choices based on taboos."

Brinn said parents who are drug veterans may be seen as more credible by their children to warn against the danger of drugs. But the bottom line, he said, is not what a parent did in their past, but what they are doing now.

"If I'm telling you not to use drugs and I have a martini in my hand every evening after work, I have no credibility with my kids," he said, warning that children learn to use drugs from parents as well as from peers.

Dennis Jr. is a 17-year-old who remembers how outraged he would get when his parents would discipline him for using drugs, although they were addicts. Like Kevin and other people quoted in this article, Dennis Jr. and his parents asked that their last names not be used.

"I'd be told not to do it, and then they'd pull out the drug in front of me and smoke it," recalled the Palm Beach County youth. "It was very hypocritical."

Dennis' mother, Louise, remembers telling her son, " 'You are the child and we are the adults. We're responsible for screwing our own lives up, but we don't want you to screw up your life.' "

Louise and her husband, Dennis Sr., used to smoke marijuana in front of their two sons, but carefully concealed their other drug use. Marijuana had somehow seemed acceptable, the hallmark of a "cool, liberated household," Louise explained.

"I didn't want my son to know what drugs I used," she said. "I wanted to be a perfect parent."

It's understandable that every father wants to be seen as Superman and every mother as a perfect mom by their offspring, Brinn said. But it's an indicator of guilt feelings and low self-esteem, and it's a deception that is not without risks.

### NO CONTRADICTIONS

"In the long run, you want your kids to really know who you are," Brinn advised. "The worst thing is for a kid to find out something and see a contradiction and feel his mom or dad is a hypocrite."

Barbara Griffith, executive director of Growing Together Inc., a Lake Worth drug-rehabilitation center for adolescents, said parents are missing an opportunity for "relationship building" if they deny their drug use.

"The kid isn't going to listen to you if they don't think you're being honest," Griffith said. "You have to tell them: These are the dangers. It wasn't OK for me and it's not OK for you. . . . You have to really be in touch with, 'Where would I be today if I still used it?' "

For Paul, a 38-year-old recovering drug addict in Palm Beach County, the best message he's given his children about drugs is by his own example.

"They've seen me high, they've seen me drunk. . . . Now that they've seen me clean and the difference in my lifestyle," Paul said. "You can talk all day long, but unless they see it, it doesn't matter."

Paul said his drug addiction has also made him well-equipped to spot a budding drug dependency in his own children.

"There's nothing they can do that I won't know," he warned.

Since Dennis and his family went into recovery a year ago at Growing Together, there have been no more drugs and no more lies.

"I can say that life is now a whole lot easier, to know how they're feeling," said Dennis Jr. "It's a lot better being honest because we don't have to hide the secrets."

In Brinn's case, he said he likely will feel like a "hero" with his two children when he inevitably admits to them he was a casual drug user in the '60s.

"I've been through those experiences, and I somehow ended up working in a field that saves people from addiction," explained the 42-year-old community affairs director at Queens Village Committee for Mental Health's Jamaica Community Adolescent Programs.

The drugs of today are far more potent, addictive and accessible than the drugs of 20 and 25 years ago, Brinn said.

"It's kind of like you don't want to touch any tentacle of this octopus at all today . . . But in the '60s and '70s, I remember, you were kind of weird if you didn't smoke pot . . . That was the honeymoon of drugs," he said. "Now we're trying to come up with some sort of divorce because . . . of the tremendous avalanche of cocaine and also the tremendous upsurge in the availability of domestic drugs."

For 12-year-old Andy, there have already been constant reminders by his father that drugs are dangerous.

"I never fail to tell him of the dangers of drugs when some professional sports figure gets in trouble over drugs and their career and their playing is destroyed," Kevin said.

#### ADMITTING THE DANGER

"Yeah, Dad," Andy tells his dad. "They're stupid."

And someday, Kevin will admit how he, too, was once stupid.

While a sophomore at a big state university in the South, Kevin was caught getting high on marijuana with some fellow students by the dorm manager. None of them was turned in, however, because the man used the drugs he confiscated to feed his own habit.

"I want to be able to say, 'Look, if I had some way to do it over again, I wouldn't do drugs, but look, if you do the same thing, it's a whole lot more dangerous than it was for me,'" Kevin said.

- Caption: PHOTO(C)Photo illustration by ALLEN EYESTONE/Staff PhotographerChildren are asking their parents: 'Did you ever use drugs?'

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