

FILM ON DRUG ABUSE A HORROR STORY THAT CAN HIT HOME

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Tonight at 9 WCPX-Channel 6 is scheduled to air a special made-for-television movie called Not My Kid. It is the story of a family's valiant struggle to help a teen-age daughter overcome the horror of drug addiction. More than that, it is quite possibly the single most instructive program ever produced on the fatal threat of drug abuse.

The movie presents a gripping, exhaustive and accurate depiction of the downward spiral of chemical dependency. There are four clearly identifiable stages, each well worth watching for -- on the screen and in the home.

In stage one, the youngster learns how easy it is to "feel good" -- usually with alcohol, tobacco and marijuana. Experimenting with an older sibling or close friend, the teen soon enters a new world where drug use is accepted, exciting and frequent.

The youngster's education now involves knowledge about drug paraphernalia. Drugs become a source not only for achieving pleasure, but for avoiding pain.

In stage two, the teen is no longer content to have someone give him drugs at parties, and seeks to have his own supply. The weekend high is no longer enough; the drug menu begins to expand. Now it's hashish, hash oil and regular raids on the family medicine cabinet.

School activities are now "uncool." Truancy, hangovers and daytime highs are on the rise. Increasingly, the teen-ager is leading a dual life -- doing the chores, going to church, participating in the family activities -- but entering another world when he leaves home.

It is at late stage two that the family should recognize and acknowledge the problem and insist upon professional treatment.

At stage three the teen-ager plans his day around getting and staying high -- on the bus before school, in the bathroom during school, on the playground, at the store, in his bedroom. Marijuana and alcohol are still the most popular drugs, but LSD, PCP and cocaine may be added to the menu.

Now the son or daughter is hard to love, and even harder to like. And no one is more pained and unhappy, confused and desperate than the teen-ager himself. When he's not high, shame and suicidal thoughts may become frequent and final.

The youngster at stage three needs immediate and extensive professional help.

At stage four, the teen-ager no longer even attempts to achieve a high. Now he would -- and could -- give his life to escape a low. The chronic cough and weight loss, the lack of memory and paranoia, the fits of anger and aggression, they are all signs that the druggie has reached the bottom of the downward spiral.

Perhaps former Minnesota Viking -- and former drug addict -- Carl Eller put best the plight of the stage-four user: "My bottom line was zero; my alternative to a cure was death."

Not My Kid is a message movie. It may not leave the viewers laughing, but it could help keep them from crying. Watch it closely and carefully. It well could be a death-defying act.

- Memo: My Word Joel Jones is director of the Straight Inc. drug treatment program in Orlando.

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