

HOW SOME PARENTS ENABLE THEIR CHILDREN TO DO DRUGS

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Every Monday and Friday night a group of parents gather in a converted warehouse in Orlando, in an overgrown box with a battleship gray concrete floor, strangely called the "Carpet Room." Here they wage their collective battles against drug abuse.

These parents often ask, "Why is my kid a druggie?" Unfortunately, there is no single, easy answer.

Many of the contributors to our kids' addictions are rooted firmly in society, prompted by the easy availability of drugs, advertising clutter shouting "do drug" messages and the enormously profitable, illegal drug industry. These contributors are somewhat beyond our control as parents. There are other, however, potentially more powerful contributors within the home and family that we can control.

Family members, unwittingly in most cases, enable their children's drug problems. Ironically, many do it out of love. I have observed three categories of enabling behaviors. There are those that provide fuel for drug abuse, those that are models for it and those that tolerate outrageous, druggie behavior.

Parents and siblings provide fuel for drug abuse when they leave their own drugs in the open, or even more blatantly, when they give drugs and alcohol to their children or brothers and sisters. They also provide fuel when they attempt to buy love and acceptance with cash or items easily converted to cash. If one of several children is doing drugs in a home, there is a good chance the user will introduce the others to drugs.

Parents enable druggie behavior when they are models of it. When you or I come home from work after a hard day, have a drink to ease the pain or to relax, we are sending a clear message to our kids. When we take a tranquilizer to "help" us through a crisis, booze to celebrate or to make us happy; when we need pills to make us sleep or to keep us awake, we're repeating the message that it is okay to use alcohol, pills, pot and other substances to change the way we feel or act.

Equally insidious is parental behavior that tolerates druggie attitudes and actions. When we pick up the pieces after our kids are kicked out of school or when they are arrested for drugs, we tolerate outrageous behavior. When we fail to give consequences when they break little (or big) rules; when we tolerate their lies and manipulations, we enable our kids to do drugs because we aren't being firm with them. Worse, when their behavior continues to be bad, fitting the criteria of the druggie, and we ignore it, or deny it, we tolerate abuse. And we're well along the road toward rearing the monsters of addiction.

The illness of chemical dependency can threaten any household. The families gathered together in the "Carpet Room" at Straight Inc. are living proof that no family is immune. Perhaps if you can learn to disable, rather than enable, druggie behaviors, you can save your families from the pain, sorrow, guilt, alienation, anxiety and remorse that follow in the wake of the monster.

On the other hand, if you are fighting it already, alone, get help. This is one battle you cannot win on your own.

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