

67 of 997 DOCUMENTS

St. Petersburg Times (Florida)

June 1, 1992, Monday, City Edition

Choosing a **drug** treatment plan

BYLINE: BRUCE A. EPSTEIN

SECTION: FLORIDIAN; PG; Parental Guidance; Doctor's Office; Pg. 5D

LENGTH: 1133 words

Many believe that the slow erosion of "good old American values" has been largely due to the crumbling of the American family unit. One reason for this problem has been the specter of substance abuse.

When a youngster needs help for an alcohol or **drug** abuse problem, parents have important decisions to make. These decisions often have to be made quickly. Not surprisingly, most parents faced with this situation have little knowledge of where to turn for help.

An initial move would be to obtain a list of local **drug** abuse treatment programs. Such lists for our area may be obtained from a variety of sources:

Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS). A current list of licensed treatment programs can be obtained from the Alcohol, **Drug** Abuse and Mental Health Program Office of the local HRS district headquarters by calling 588-6600.

Florida Alcohol and **Drug** Abuse Association. A directory of licensed alcohol and **drug** abuse treatment, intervention and prevention programs is available to the public from the association at a nominal cost. Call 893-2121 for more information.

Schools. High school principals, school social workers and guidance counselors are familiar with local treatment programs.

Therapeutic Communities of America (TCA). TCA is a national professional organization that represents long term alcohol and **drug** abuse treatment programs throughout the United States. Most midsize and large cities have TCA programs.

Straight Inc., in St. Petersburg, is an example of a long-term substance abuse treatment program based upon the therapeutic community model, and I am a member of its board. Since its founding in 1976, **Straight** has treated more than 50,000 family members nationwide with a 70 percent success rate. **Straight** is fully licensed and accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations the nation's recognized accrediting agency. The phone number for **Straight** is 577-6011.

National Institute on **Drug** Abuse (NIDA). The institute is the main federal agency that funds **drug** abuse treatment and research in the United States. A hot line is available daily from 9 a. m. to 5 p. m. for referrals to programs throughout

the country. The hot line number is (800) 662-4357.

The National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and **Drug** Information (301 468-2600) can provide names of mental health practitioners who have special expertise in the treatment of **drug**-involved adolescents.

There are many factors to consider when the time comes to choose a treatment program. Selecting the best program for your child is selecting a doctor get recommendations, ask questions and gather all the information you can.

No single program is right for everyone. Programs vary greatly in their approach to treating substance abusers and their families. Programs also differ greatly in the cost of treatment. Appropriate treatment can range from weekly outpatient group or individual counseling to daily day care treatment to residential treatment lasting many months.

When evaluating a program for their children, parents should consider the following questions:

1. Does the program require total abstinence from **drugs**?

Most experts in **drug** treatment agree that programs requiring total abstinence from **drugs** are the most successful.

Only when the body is free of **drugs** can the process of recovery begin. It may take several weeks of no **drug** use for the body to cleanse itself. It is important that the child be in a therapeutic and protective environment, one that can keep him **drug**-free until the chemicals are out of his system.

2. Does the program make provisions for the fact that **drug** involvement is a chronic illness?

Parents should be wary of "quick fixes" for children with severe **drug** and behavior problems. Situations that developed over a long period of time usually require long-term treatment.

The program should provide some formal aftercare that enables the **drug**-free child and family to return to the program on a regular basis for ongoing counseling and support.

3. Does the program have a family component that recognizes the importance of parent and sibling involvement?

Drug use affects the behavior and feelings of the entire family. The most effective treatment programs treat **drug** use as a family problem and strongly encourage the involvement of all family members in the treatment process.

4. Does the program address the addictive process and its consequences?

Drug use leads to problems in every area of a child's life. Successful treatment programs help children reconstruct the areas of their lives that have been damaged by **drug** use, such as family relationships, education, the use of leisure time and self-esteem.

Once parents decide on a specific program, the following need to be considered:

How long is the program? What are its goals for participants?

Is the program licensed by HRS or accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health Care Organizations? Does the program have other credentials or accreditation?

What are the qualifications of the staff?

Does the program have a board of directors or an advisory group? Have local community groups been involved

with the program, and do they support it?

Is there a parent group or a volunteer group affiliated with the program? Does the program work with the families or provide **drug** education to parents?

Is the program properly registered with the county or state? How long has the program been providing treatment services?

It is always advisable to visit the programs you are considering for your child and get a first-hand view. It is important to be comfortable with what you see. With a little time and diligence, a parent can become well-informed about which programs offer quality services.

Even though parents may feel that something must be done "right now," a little investigation is in order to help their child obtain the most appropriate treatment available.

Deciding to enroll a child in a formal substance abuse program is not an easy decision. Getting involved is a first and difficult move.

Dr. Bruce A. Epstein has practiced pediatrics in St. Petersburg since 1973. He is a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics. He is married and has three grown children.

If you have questions for Dr. Epstein, write to Doctor's Office, Parental Guidance/Floridian, the Times, P.O. Box 419, St. Petersburg 33731-0419.

LOAD-DATE: November 3, 1992

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

GRAPHIC: COLOR PHOTO; Dr. Bruce A. Epstein

Times Publishing Company