

## Laura Mersereau Award Essay

In our community many families are affected by drugs and alcohol. Those that take drugs and alcohol do not realize how much destruction and hurt they can cause everyone around them. It is devastating to hear when someone breathes their last breath by the intoxication or overdose of drugs. It is upsetting how many people are killed in car crashes, suicides, and other situations that drugs and alcohol can cause. Unfortunately, there does not seem to be an end to high school students taking drugs and alcohol anytime soon. Many students take part in this horrific act because they want to be cool, fit in, and even experiment. However, the most challenging factor influencing their decision is the fact that they do not have the confidence to say no. Because most students are not strong enough in their own beliefs, students are constantly being peer pressured into taking drugs. Although everyone has a choice and should make the best choices possible, many students do not have the confidence to stand up against peer pressure. In order to build confidence in high school students, we need to provide more positive extra curricular activities that boost self esteem, award those that choose to do the right thing, and keep students being productive together. We should also be more proactive in our schools and homes. Schools should provide more information about drugs and families should keep better track of what their students are doing and who their friends are.

Why is there so much trouble with high school students? What leads them into the life of drugs and alcohol? There are numerous reasons, but the most challenging factor is peer pressure. There are times when you can see a person and understand why they are in a group

of friends that use drugs or have sip of alcohol before or after school. Schools and parents should take responsibility with the epidemic that is occurring with most high school students. If schools and families provided drug free activities for students, then students would have a place to go and be together. They would have a place to build their confidence and improve their self esteem, so that when they are faced with peer pressure they would not give in.

Another way we could help our students become drug-free is be more pro-active. Students should be tested for drugs and alcohol in schools randomly. This is a great way of protecting our students. Along with random drug tests, we should also provide more information for our students about how bad drugs and alcohol can be. The more students know the better decisions they can make about their own lives. As a community we should teach our students how to make good choices for themselves.

Along with schools, families should be proactive as well. Parents need to be more involved in their child's life; parents should have more control. Parents should know and have a say in who the students are friends with. A parent must be involved in their students life in order for the student to care about their own life. Parents and schools should join forces to prevent teen drug use! There are many things that we can do that can prevent us from bad influences and bad situations. Parents, mentors, and experienced adults should take a more active role in student's lives. This way they can provide better guidance and help students make better choices.

There are many reasons why students turn to drugs and alcohol. Some give into peer pressure, while some don't know any better to make a better decision. Even though students

should learn how to make their own good decisions, schools and families should be more involved with educating and guiding students to make better decisions. Schools should provide tests and classes, while parents should be more involved with who their child is friends with. Studies show, that a lot of students are going to be less involved in drugs or alcoholic when parents and schools are more involved and have more interest in their child's life. It is when adults take an active interest in a life, that students will take more of interest in their own life as well. They will build their self-esteem and confidence.

## Laura Mersereau Essay Contest

September twenty-fourth, October fifteenth and January seventh. A handful of random dates, but they add up to one of the biggest reality checks I've ever experienced. Those days are forever burned into my memory but the one date I cannot remember is the pivotal day where I could have made a change. The twenty-fourth is the day my best friend, of thirteen years, told me that he was dealing ecstasy. October fifteenth is the day he was arrested at school, just two days before his eighteenth birthday. January the seventh is the day he goes to court and his life rests in the hands of one Oregon judge. The moment I found out about his arrest, all of our childhood memories we had together flashed through my mind. Was that just last week when we were playing Marco-Polo in his pool or was that when we were six? I thought about when we played cops and robbers, but this time the cuffs weren't coming off. I couldn't pull out the plastic key and save him like I always did. My failure to act has led to a chain of events where everyone, from family members, friends and peers are now all profoundly affected by substance abuse.

I take heart in how I see my friend's family stand beside him through this, but underneath the façade I know they will never be the same. My friend's family came to talk over what had occurred with my parents. Instantly both mothers were crying, and earlier my mom had asked me, "What should one do in this situation?" There is no simple answer; a gesture of sympathy is all one can give. The moment that is most vivid in my mind though is when my friend's father turned to me and choked up while telling me to take care of his boy. One of the toughest men I have known all my life cried, I hope that I can live up to what he asked.

Since that conversation I have tried to determine where everything went wrong. I think the answer lies in many factors that go into the decision to take drugs or alcohol. Besides the cheap price and the ready availability, I think, it's the lack of foreseeable repercussions. Neither my friend nor I ever even thought about him getting caught, and neither did any other of the dozens of kids I know. My friend just described it as an innate fascination with drugs and their effects, even from an early age. Every new high was an experience and people want to try them all. It doesn't make it any easier that in order to fit in you need to take drugs. The last year a rift had been growing between my friend and I. I was always somewhat of an outsider with his group. You're either in or you're out, and they try very hard to make you part of that "in" group. Peer pressure is an enormous factor in every decision and at the very least someone is introducing you to the "latest and greatest."

Perhaps the biggest reason for substance abuse lies in the fact that most people can get away with it. Parents have come to accept the occasional drinking and even pot smoking. A reason for this is in part a failure of the education system. What does it say about an institution where someone who is on drugs everyday can still manage a 3.7 GPA? Parents don't scrutinize an educationally responsible child. Most drug users manage to handle their course load because the system fails to challenge them. To learn and take pride in knowledge is the best high I know, but most kids fail to experience this because the high schools motto is to graduate students even at dismally low standards.

Looking back many friends, too many, have fallen into the lifestyle of recreational drug use. I found resistance in being comfortable with who I am. There was never a need to prove anything to anyone. I always had my books and my music, most importantly though I had my thirst for knowledge. These activities always took precedence over trying to fit in, but

managing that is important too. One thing I was always capable of was keeping an eclectic group of friends; from the debate team to the football team, I've met them all. These unique experiences allowed me to avoid drugs and alcohol while being immersed in them at the same time. A one-man crusade against drugs and alcohol would be impossible, but I now know that every little bit can make a difference. My teacher and friend asked me, "How do you manage to stay away from it all?" I don't necessarily believe I have avoided anything though. I feel as if I was the not-so-innocent bystander of events that lead to a predictable outcome. I fought with where my duty as a best friend lay. The ultimate factor in my silence was my failure to see the negative consequences. I made the decision to try and be the *friend* and in doing so I failed as his *best* friend. I won't allow myself, or any of my friends, to ever make the same mistakes.

## **With Such High Statistics, Go Ahead and Pick Your Poison**

Everyday, drugs and alcohol become more accessible to people of all ages. One statistic (found on the website [alcoholselfhelpnews.com](http://alcoholselfhelpnews.com)), which is probably the most disturbing is that everyday, around 4,700 American youth under age eighteen try marijuana for the first time, and by the time students finish eighth grade, fifty percent of kids have tried alcohol and twenty percent have actually been drunk. These numbers are heartbreaking, shocking, and makes most wonder how drugs and alcohol became such a popular commodity for students beginning in middle school. Because of such high drug and alcohol percentages found in junior high, it is almost guaranteed by statistics that many high school students have or will use either substance.

There is not a concrete generalization of why high school students use drugs and/or alcohol. For some, it is used as a coping mechanism, and for others, simply a way to have fun in the midst of teenage boredom. Therefore, as a former alcohol experimentalist myself, I have composed a list of reasons why drugs and alcohol are so popular in the life of a teenager and what factors lead to the usage of both substances.

In a world of sexual and physical abuse, high divorce rates and rising crime, high schoolers are growing up in desperate times. Drugs and alcohol are a teen's outlet to get away from the world for a bit. These substances are used as a coping mechanism because

of the artificial and short-lived side effects, which attracts teens. Teens also depend on drugs and alcohol for fun. The good feeling one receives from getting high and/or drunk is addictive. Finally, kids feel like they cannot have a good time unless substances are included in the mix.

It is very surprising how many parties go on with a parent or guardian “hiding” in the back room of the house. Guardians/parents want to make their kids happy and so when they see that partying is how their teens like to have fun, they will do anything to stay on their teen’s good side, even though it may be compromising their better judgment. The combination of “the good time” and the lack of parental control is another reason why so many high school students use drugs and alcohol.

Every student goes through a rebellious stage and that was the reason why I chose to try out drinking. Influenced by my peers and frustrated at my strict parents, I found that drinking was an outlet in my life that I could control. The control factor was not the only reason why I chose to drink. Who I was spending my time with played a big part in my decision to drink as well. I am not an easily influenced person, and I was not pressured into drinking, but I became who my friends were and a lot of my friends at that time were partiers who rebelled against their parents. Therefore, I became a carbon copy.

Additionally, one of the biggest reasons why high school teenagers drink is because of the media. Drugs and alcohol are everywhere: music, movies, television and radio. Alcohol commercials show beautiful, sexy people sipping drinks at clubs and rocking parties. When teenagers see these commercials, they are persuaded into thinking that with that specific alcohol, they will have an amazing time and be just as desired as the sexy men or women in the advertisement. Drugs are referred to in thousands of songs

done by famous rappers. In the rap song “Get Em High” by the famous Kanye West, West says “All the girls pass the weed to your Mother F\*\*\*\*\*n man, Get Em High.”

What are these messages sending the youth of America?

With all of the endless reasons why high school students choose to drink and/or use drugs, questions have been raised about lowering the drinking age to eighteen, considering how many minors drink anyways. Also, it is now legal in some states to use marijuana as a painkiller. Once again, I will state that everyday, drugs and alcohol are becoming more accessible to people of all ages.

I have not had a stellar record with alcohol, but I think that is what makes my story more interesting about how and why I decided to resist the temptation of such a dangerous substance.

While my choice to experiment with drinking was not an addiction or something I did every weekend, it was still dangerous and foolish of me. I rode in cars and drank from random cups at parties. I always prided myself on being an individualist and someone who does not follow the masses. Finally, a very good friend who I once helped get out of drinking let me get a taste of my own medicine. I realized that I had become the person who I used to feel sorry for. I was always so proud for not participating in the partying scene, and I was doing the one thing that I remember hating so much. So, with much accountability from positive and supportive friends, I said farewell to the bad influences in my life, as well as the old me.



In December 2008 my then 21-year-old brother received his first Driving under the influence (DUI) charge against him. I woke up to see two policemen standing next to my Christmas tree in the family room and my Mother screaming at my brother over the phone. I watched my big brother get hand cuffed and put in the back of a police car that night, and from that point on I made the choice to never drink alcohol. I am making a difference by sharing my brother's story when he will not; I am making a difference by saying no and by changing the minds of as many around me as I can.

My freshman year of high school my best friend got drunk for the first time. She got so drunk that her dad and brother had to pick her up; it is safe to say that this affected both of our lives for months to come. We could not hang out with anyone that her parents did not know nor could we drive with anyone that was a teenager. I had not even done anything, yet I was forced to change almost every aspect of my social life because of this choice she had made. She did this simply because of the friends that she hung around when I was busy and I refused to hang around them for this reason. I think that peer pressure had a huge amount to do with this; even though it sounds generic it is true. Half of the people who drink and party at my school would not if they hung out with me every weekend, I pressure people to not drink. However in my brother's case I think that it is a little bit of peer pressure and how he has made it into a way to deal with pain.

When he was a freshman, he was made fun of so badly that he is now scarred from it and I believe that had he not had this experience in his life that he would not had turned to such heavy drug and alcohol use.

The hardest part about staying strong and saying no is not being hurt by the people who do out and get drunk or high anyways. I challenge people to be better than those around them and to be called to a higher standard of living. I get a lot of talk back when I say this and many people who do not believe me when I say that I will forever be sober. This is hard, people are mean plain and simple.

However to be honest it is not a struggle for me to stay away from drugs and alcohol. I have surrounded myself around people who lift me up and do not drag me down with talks of partying.

One of my closest friends has told me a little about her past and she did drink and party just a few months ago. I have never brought her back to that scene and I will not let her take her self back. I bring people into friendship with me completely sober and instead of heading out to tempting parties and hanging around people who use drugs and drink I hang around those who like me just do not do that type of stuff.

I tell people who struggle with alcohol about my brother and my best friend. I tell them straight up that I can see nothing good coming from this and they can either accept it and hang out with me and have fun that can actually be remembered or they can make the choice that could be one of their last. I never turn anyone away because of their past, I

just love them no matter what. That is what can change the world and bring people away from drugs and alcohol, this is what I do.

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# Laura Mersereau Memorial Essay

How to start? That's not easy. How could such a familiar subject be so hard to write about? I know several people that have taken that wrong road to substance dependence, and I have used drugs before. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ I am 14 years of age, 5'1, and 130 lbs, I was a daily marijuana user from late 6<sup>th</sup> grade to the end of last summer, and I would like to share my connection.

I truly believe that most kids experiment with drugs and alcohol with only innocent intentions and fun in mind. They try it to fit in, to make it with that crowd they crave to be a part of. In many cases, including Laura's, the experimenting goes much, much too far. The supposedly "harmless experimentation" turns into full fledged drug addiction. The person will try much harder and more addictive drugs, and that's when the negative consequences peek their ugly heads. They start doing anything, and I mean ANYTHING to get their drugs, to escape from the withdrawal symptoms that they will kill to avoid.

In Portland, the biggest and most prominent drug problem is methamphetamine, a.k.a. speed, meth. crystal, tina and many other names. Portland has the worst meth problem in the United States, and maybe the world. A person I was extremely close to tried meth, and it was over. He assaulted me, and stole \$20 from my wallet, presumably to buy meth. This has a lasting effect on me. It fascinates me how a small shard of crystal can turn my best friend into a monster. I guess I will never know. I have since become distant from him, and I am glad. I don't want the temptation to take over me and make me try that horrendous drug. It is amazing that after all I know about this, how it has turned my friend into a completely different person, I could even think about doing drugs, but it's not as distant of a thought as one might think it would be. I know for sure that I will not try any drugs besides the ones that I have done in the past, but there is always a tiny thought, a fleck, asking "What if?"

I am proud to say that I have turned so many people that I care about away from drugs. I guess I am the "anti-drug." I know this essay isn't exactly what the guidelines asked for, but I just thought I would share my experiences and a little knowledge of drugs I have. I don't care if I win or not, this is an important subject in my life, and that's what matters. In conclusion, drugs are a devastating thing in our community and our world, and they need to be stopped.

I'm going to talk about why I think high school students take drugs and alcohol. Also what is their greatest influence on this decision. The last thing I'm going to talk about is how I would resist this influence and steps I could take to prevent another student from using drugs and alcohol.

In my opinion I think that high school students are drinking and doing drugs due to peer pressure. Pressure from friends, television and even from parents. What I think the most influential factor is their friends. Many students friends offer them drugs or alcohol so they think they're cool acceptance. Another reason they want to hang out with them and if their friends also do drugs and they don't want to be left out. The way I would resist this influence is by saying "no" to my friends when they offer drugs or alcohol and to avoid hanging out with them. If someone I knew wanted to do drugs I would tell them why its bad to do drugs and how it can ruin your future.

As a student a have a strong understanding of why students do drugs or alcohol . Many of this factors need to be stop to prevent students from using drugs or alcohol.