

## **This Is Reality**

Drug and alcohol abuse is getting worse every year especially for high school students. It's hard for many people my age to make wise decisions. Many high school students taking drugs or drinking alcohol go through tough situations and want to forget their problems. Curiosity, depression, peer pressure, family problems and easy access to the substance can make any teenager become dependent on the drug or alcohol because sometimes it's their only way out of reality.

One of the biggest and initial factors that I have seen as to why many high school students drink or take drugs is because of peer pressure and curiosity. It happens a lot at parties where alcohol or drugs are provided. Students may be the victims without knowing it because they may get pressured to do something that they don't want to do. Maybe some students want to try something new and that's the whole reason as to why they went to the party in the first place. Peer pressure and curiosity got the best of my friend Julian because he wanted to fit in with the others.

Families of drug or alcohol users become the immediate victims and the unintended enablers. In some families and cultures parents are usually the ones that start giving out alcohol to their teenager. They think that it's ok because they are watching them but it's really not. They don't realize that if they keep giving their teen alcohol, there is a chance that the teen will keep drinking in the future and have a tolerance for it. After Julian started drinking at parties he got alcohol from his dad and started drinking with him everyday. At first I didn't think it would be a problem but as I saw him drinking more and more, I began to wonder if he was ever going to stop.

At one point everyone struggles in life and we all go through very difficult times. Sometimes we don't know what to do or we don't know what direction or path we should take. Being depressed or confused after having a bad experience may lead to trying to find other ways to forget about your problems. Many teens find alcohol and drugs as an alternative way to try to forget about their troubles. Julian had problems at work and at school; he had anxiety problems and he was depressed which meant that he had all signs of comorbidity of addiction. At that point I knew that if he didn't do anything to help himself, I had to do something to try to help him. The thing that scared me the most was that he started to lose control over himself and he had developed a tolerance for alcohol and cocaine.

You can resist and be above the influence by being the better person and thinking twice. I would tell anyone to think about their future. To think about the goals that were once planned and to think about the family that might be suffering. The most important thing anyone can do is to think about oneself. I would give anyone all my support and encourage that person to get professional help. I would be there 100% of the way and give that person positive things to look forward to. I did this with Julian and it took him a while to adapt to a life without drugs or alcohol. After the treatment he had, his effort along with his family's effort and mine had been worth it after all. He has been able to live a drug free life. To me teamwork has been a really important factor in his recovery process. I think everyone deserves a chance to live a drug free life without having to escape from reality.

## The Driving Force of Teenage Substances Abuse

Each year in Tigard, alcohol and drug use leads to deaths, injuries, and domestic violence. Last year alone 96 teenagers received a Minor In Possession (MIP) within Tigard and two of these offenders were also Driving Under the Influence (DUI). These stats are terrifying to the community because it means that teenagers are becoming abusers of alcohol and drugs earlier in their lives. But where does the addiction begin for teens? Why do teens become addicted? How can a community work together to stop substance abuse among our youth? The environment that a teenager lives in can dictate their decision to refuse or give into illegal activities. In a tightly knitted environment such as a school, students can be pushed by their friends to experiment with drugs and alcohol. As a community, we can work together to educate our youth in the devastating effects of substances abuse.

The force pushing students to experiment with drugs and alcohol is their environment that they reside in. Students who grow up in a drug infested home may believe that drugs are acceptable because their role models are using them. The dad of a family I know irresponsibly smokes marijuana with his children's knowledge. One of his sons got a MIP at the age of 17. His other son was sent to a youth disciplinary camp for his struggles with drug addiction while attending high school. A violent or divided household can cause students to turn to liquor and drugs for a temporary relief. The drugs give these teens an escape from a life that they desperately wish they were not apart of. Strict and suppressive parents can also push their children to rebel against them at the first chance the teens have at freedom. A typical case of this is when their children head off to college where they experience unregulated freedom. Curiosity is another reason that guides teens to experiment with drugs and alcohol.

These students may want to know how a drug high feels, why their friends do it, and why their parents are against drug use.

The main factor that pushes students to experiment with drugs and alcohol appears to be their high school environment. Friends have the most influence over teenagers during their high school careers. A clique of students will follow one or two different leaders in the way that they dress and act. In a tight-knit group of teenagers, like a clique, the leaders have a significant influence over the other members of the group. That means if the leader starts going to parties and drinking the rest of the group will follow the leader's example. In some cases, teenagers are reluctant to start drinking, but their friends pressure them to act cool. Peer pressure can be the single component that pushes a teenager to his or her limit of personal resistance against alcohol. Like alcohol, the major influence that drives teens to experiment with drugs is their group of friends that they associate with throughout their young adult life. There are certain groups in high school that are known as being the crowd of drug abusers. Once teenagers are accepted into these groups they could be pressured to use or sell drugs. Many teenagers are not strong enough to resist peer pressure because they do not know how to say no to their friends. They are afraid of sacrificing their friendship because they are unwilling to try a shot of alcohol or a hit off of a joint.

The reason I resist drugs and alcohol is because I am aware of the devastating effects that it can have on teenagers. Last year alone the rate of fatal alcohol-involved crashes among drivers between 16 and 20 years old was more than twice the rate of drivers 21 and older. I understand that once a person starts drinking their judgment becomes shrouded by the alcohol. The best way to prevent teens from using alcohol and drugs is to have other teenagers educate them about the affects of such substances. Because teens are the biggest influence on

other teens when taking drugs, they can also become an important tool in preventing further drug use. As a school, Tigard High must attempt to teach the effects of drugs and alcohol. But as student body we need to set up and make clubs that reward students who attempt to stay drug free. The club needs to teach students effective ways to say no to peer pressure. This club must also bring students in who have had drug problems and help them avoid drugs by stating real facts and sharing real life stories. Basically this club has to be a support system for those who have no where else to turn. The advisor for this club should definitely be a counselor who can teach the club leadership how to deal with these difficult situations.

Each year teenagers are injured or killed due to drug and alcohol use. They are influenced by the environment they grew up in and the environment that they currently live in. Violent households, splintered families, strict parents, and drug infested households can cause teenagers to turn to drugs as an escape from their dreadful lives. But the major pressure that drives teenagers to experiment is the influence of their friends. During high school, students begin to sway away from their parents' advice; in turn, they begin to listen to people their own age. As a community, we must work together to educate our youth so when they are put into a peer pressure situation involving drugs or alcohol they know how to act accordingly.