

Throughout the nation drug and alcohol abuse is spreading fast, it spreads faster and faster every day. Growing up in Portland, Oregon I learned to ignore it by letting things go and worrying about myself. If only I had said or done something about it, maybe I would see my father more. Now that I am being addressed about this horrible issue that is spreading around my city so fast, I want to help kids my age to avoid following in the footsteps of those who are addicted. I want to help those who have parents addicted, or those who are addicted themselves. It is sad to see young kids my age that can't help but to shoot up or drink every day. It is also very hard to have parents who you know love you, but they won't show it because these drugs have changed them into an unrecognizable monster. I know this because I have experienced it myself. It should be a requirement for every student to take a drug and alcohol class, that goes beyond that of an everyday health class, in order to graduate high school, whether they have abused drugs and alcohol or not. There should also be more help and more attention given to those who are addicted.

My father always told me he loved me, but when he started doing drugs he acted like I didn't matter to him anymore. At first it really bothered me; it's not easy for a 10 year old to have a father who doesn't care about her. I wanted him to stop, I cried and cried until I couldn't cry anymore, but the drugs were more important to him. I eventually learned how to avoid it, but it still hurts every day. I know he loves me, he just doesn't know how to show it anymore. I know I will never be like him. My kids are going to know I love them and will never have to question that. Seeing what drugs did to my father makes me never want to do them. Without outside supports children of addicted parents often stumble down the same path. There should be help for these people.

Drug and alcohol abuse is a huge issue in America as well as right here in Portland, Oregon. It is not only adults who are abusing drugs. The youth are getting addicted at a vast speed. For this reason it should be required for every high school student to take a drug and alcohol class regardless of their history with these substances. The class should be similar to the class provided by the state but for high school students. It should also include health issues showing what each drug does to your body. There should also be some public speakers who come in and explain the affect drugs have had on their life. This will give students the knowledge they need to be more aware of what drugs and alcohol can do.

For those who choose to abuse drugs after taking the class, there should be additional help. The problem in Oregon is that when kids get caught they get in trouble and have to suffer the consequence. After they get done with the law they are often thrown back on the streets where they go back to doing the same thing. Once a youth gets caught they should be forced to stay in a home for a certain amount of time depending on their level of addiction. If they are still in school they will be excused and their work will be sent to them. They will have a therapist who will help them get through this and no longer abuse drugs. After the stay at the home, the therapist will still be there for the youth for as long as needed. The therapist will also help the youth find the right environment to live and hang around. Once the therapist feels that youth is ready to be on his/her own they will be released from the program.

Many young people around my age are being affected by drugs and alcohol, in order to stop this and save their future it is going to be hard. Although we can't stop it all

it would be nice to lower the substance abuse levels. It breaks my heart to see kids I knew in middle school and elementary school who are now addicted to drugs. This is why I think more should be done in order to help them stop using drugs and alcohol. If I could share my story and feelings on how my father's drug addiction has affected me, with every youth in Oregon in order for them to stop their addiction, I would. I would take my own time to address how it feels and what it can do to a person. But for now I think that making it a requirement for Oregon students to take a drug and alcohol class would help. Although I feel there should be more help, this would be a great start. Drugs and alcohol affect who you are and what you do; it takes the potential away and creates a monster. Drug and alcohol abuse needs to be stopped.

## Drug Prevention in Society

The amount of drinking and drugs in society these days is crazy and at an all-time high. Students are going above and beyond with substance abuse. Something needs to change to help all these teens.

Many students get curious or may be peer- pressured to act on drinking or taking drugs. They think nothing will happen, or it is just once so you can't get addicted. This is where they are wrong. Half of all high school students are smoking marijuana, or going to parties on the weekends and getting drunk.

I personally see more high school students using substances rather than focusing on school. They love the feeling drugs give them, or the "awesome" things they do when they are drunk. Apathy is rampant. You see high school students drop out more each year or just not care. The ambition they have to graduate and go to college is getting lower. They don't have goals or care to pursue them. I will admit high school can have its hard and stressful times, but in the end it is worth it and the feeling that it gives you is so much better. Knowing that you completed 4 years of high school on your own and stuck it out is better than any drug. The pride of accomplishment ---now that is a high!

Substance abuse can ruin your life. If you have a job you soon won't, you spend all your money on, you don't focus much, you hurt others around you, and so many more reasons why. A friend of mine went through phases like that. I was worried about her, tried to make her stop, the friendship went downhill, but by then all she cared about was the drugs. It isn't worth it at all.

These high school students are finding drug dealers easily through friends or whoever. Schools can't do much, some parents are unaware, and it is getting easier to get a hold of them. It seems to me friends are who they listen to. I look up to my friends, and I am not the only one. If they have support that is a start. If you know someone drinking or taking drugs something needs to be done. There are many help lines you can call; rehab, parents, church, clinics, etc. I know what's running through your head.....I don't want my friend to get mad or hate me, or I don't want to be the reason or it isn't my place.

Well, would you rather your friend be mad ..... or dead?



## SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN OUR COMMUNITY

Every Community has its certain level of problems when it comes to alcohol and drug abuse. Thankfully for us, this problem is not as bad in our community as it is in Los Angeles , or Houston for example. I live in the Troutdale area, not much ever happens out here, but there is always drug abuse or alcohol abuse happening somewhere nearby. I for one find this to be a burden on our community. Our tax dollars and time wasted just to hunt down slum who abuse the privileges to have alcohol, and in some cases, certain drug privileges. If it were up to me, I would limit the amount of alcohol that could be sold to a person at a time. This is a new century of all men, it is time to bring the future today.

As I said before and I will say it again, the problem is not as bad as other areas, but it still looms among our small community. Once and a while there will be a drunk driver among our streets. At times, a family member or friend will abuse alcohol or an illegal or legal drug. Even once every month or so, a drug dealer will try to ruin another teen's life in a matter of one transaction. The problem is in our own community, it's not that big, but it is here and it will not go away. Due to this small predicament in our community, teens everyday face the temptation to take that first swallow of beer, or that first hit on a joint. There are the drug dealers who prey on the teens for their money. Then there are the other teens which are already addicted to a drug or an alcoholic beverage that bring peer pressure to their friends on a daily basis. Finally there are the commercials each teen always see when they watch their favorite show, or a sport on TV or radio. No matter where I stand or what I watch, I am always bombarded by the advertisements on TV for that "cold refreshing taste" of beer and that pothead person who tempts me into taking the first puff. We know the problem exists, but what makes this problem such a big issue in our community and all other communities around the world.

There are many factors in a teenagers decision whether he should try drugs, or alcohol, or both. The first I see in influencing a teenager is their own peers. Peers are most likely the number one reason why teens always try

drugs and alcohol at parties, a friends house, even on the streets. If only more people could say no to drugs and alcohol, there would be no drug or alcohol problems at and around school and parties. Another challenging factor in a teenager's decision is also influenced by the media. Every time a teenager or any person turns on the radio or TV, they are bombard by commercials and shows that include alcohol and drug use or advertisement of alcohol and drugs. There are many other influences in every community, I can't name them all because there are simply too many and many possibilities for drug and alcohol abuse in every community.

When there are problems, there are always solutions or steps into preventing another person from making the same mistake. In the case of drug and alcohol abuse among teenagers, there are steps involved around preventing more teens from drinking or using drugs. The first step and the most common way to resist drugs and alcohol use is simply to say "no" firmly and show the person you are talking to. If they are already addicted to a drug or alcohol, the first and most important thing to do is to admit to someone you have a problem and need help as soon as possible. Then they will go to a rehabilitation center and get the help they need for whatever time it takes for that individual to get back on the right track. Finally the user who goes through these hard times need family and good friends to encourage the user to go get help and get the treatment they need as soon as possible. With these steps to prevent you or a friend from using drugs and alcohol, you will do your community a big favor.

## **Laura Mersereau Memorial Award Essay Contest**

The danger of alcohol and drug abuse is no secret. Substance abuse permeates our culture and wreaks havoc indiscriminately on the lives of young and old, rich and poor alike. It destroys families, ruins relationships and slowly kills the users themselves. Yet despite this knowledge I have seen my friends and peers fall victim to the lures of drugs and alcohol. I have seen them throw away their ambition and talent in favor of a quick thrill and a cheap high. So why does this happen? Why do so many cast away their lives so idly? I believe that the answer lies in the lack of family involvement, the social incentives to use and the need for temporary escape. All these issues stem from a central factor; a culture that encourages substance abuse.

Addiction is by no means confined to a certain kind of person, through a lapse in judgment or poor choices, anyone can fall prey to substance abuse. Yet many parents seem to believe that their child is somehow exempt from these dangers, or worse yet, they believe that they themselves are infallible role models.

I have seen countless adults drunk at high school football games, Christmas parties, or friend's houses. Some even continue to smoke pot; a relic from old college days. How can teens be expected to abstain from substance abuse when they see their primary role models, their parents, recklessly indulging in drugs and alcohol? Such behavior only perpetuates the cycle of addiction.

Many parents choose to tolerate the alcohol or drug abuse of their children. Some just want to be accepted or slow their fading presence in their child's life. Perhaps they believe that a little experimentation now will discourage full-fledged abuse in the future. In reality, this laissez-faire approach only encourages addiction and the use of extremely dangerous drugs that can do irreversible harm or kill instantly. Parents need to seek an active role in their children's lives and

provide a good model of behavior at all costs. In this way, parents can directly help to break the cycle of addiction and reduce the risk of experimentation.

Another huge incentive for high schoolers to use is social atmosphere, the long held belief that “everyone is doing it”. The lure of drugs is particularly strong for teenagers because they face it at a time when they are becoming independent; striving to find themselves and to find where they belong. Many teens drink or use drugs to anchor themselves to a group of people where they feel they will be accepted; to make themselves feel cool or to simply have fun. There is constant pressure to imbibe in many social situations. I cannot count the number of times I have been offered drugs and alcohol. An eternal media blitz saturates our lives with images of thrilling people drinking and partying. Next to them, our lives can seem boring and stale.

It is sometimes easy to feel that I am missing out on something in my sobriety; but when I look at the lives of my friends who chose a different path than I did, I see only broken dreams and a stagnant existence. I see numb shells that once contained such vibrant life, and the pain of this vision alone is enough to keep me from abusing drugs.

I have been blessed to grow up in a stable atmosphere with a loving family and strong moral influences, but others are not so lucky. The need to escape from chaotic environments of abuse, depression, a ruptured family or a broken relationship can lead to substance abuse. Teens in these environments often look to the ephemeral escape of drugs to take away their pain. In reality they only aggravate their situations and acquire addictions which haunt them their whole lives.

We live in a culture that encourages instant gratification over long-term incentives. In such chaotic environments, how can a teen be expected to wait patiently for things to improve when the world of drugs offers social acceptance and a quick escape? Even the most practical person

can lose sight of the future benefits of sobriety and dangers of abuse when only the present is visible.

It is important to provide therapeutic resources for these teens and to make it known that there are other solutions to these problems. Pumping teens full of antidepressants and other medications is not a complete solution and in many cases only compounds the addictive nature of the teen. I do my best to support those I know who face domestic chaos and depression and constantly encourage them to find help while providing moral support. The welfare and sobriety of those I care about has been a colossal issue in my life and I will continue to fight for it.

I believe the most important thing we can do as individuals to fight the culture of abuse is to take personal pride in our sobriety. I have seen too many people ashamed of their abstinence. They feel like losers, social outcasts or wimps. This is not right. Those who abstain should see themselves as strong individuals, free from a dependence on artificial substances to get them through their lives. I will live my life free of chemical crutches and succeed on my own terms, regardless of the obstacles I may encounter.

As teens we can help to stem substance abuse by encouraging strong family involvement, rejecting social pressures to use, and overcoming the urges of temporary escape. By taking pride in our sobriety we can find the strength to reject the culture of indulgence and abuse and end the cycles of addiction within our lives.



## Laura Mersereau Memorial Essay

Drug abuse has become a terrible contagious disease that has spread all across America. Teenagers, especially, have turned to drug use in attempt to solve their problems. Although the roots of drug use run deep, there is a way to stop the spread of drugs. Peer pressure and stress lead to the devastating decision of alcohol and drug abuse, from which there is often no return. People of all ages need to know just how dangerous drugs are for them, their family and their communities.

In the areas surrounding Portland, Oregon, substance abuse has become a major source of conflict and despair. Families are profoundly affected by drug abuse. To see someone you love getting trapped in addiction tears families and relationships apart. Drug users become self-centered and totally focused on obtaining drugs or alcohol at any expense. For this reason, drug users often find themselves friendless and separated from their families. Many high school students, simply thinking of the present moment, decide to use drugs and alcohol. Drug abuse may not hurt them immediately, but it will eventually lead to deep addiction and declining health. As with all people, teenagers desire acceptance from their peers, and the sad truth is that drugs can often provide that. What starts out as a social activity turns into something that consumes their lives.

The decision to use drugs or drink heavily has devastating repercussions that threaten all of society. Knowing what substance abuse does to people, it does not seem logical that anyone would want to use drugs. This only goes to show how powerful the urge becomes when teenagers are pressured by a "friend." Young people do not always think of what could happen to them; they use drugs to maintain a social life, but they do not realize how they could really

destroy their lives. One homeless, drug-addicted man said on video, “Don’t use drugs if you want a life, it will literally eat you up.” The Portland Police officer who made the tape is showing hoping to bring about change in communities. His powerful videos show young people just how horrible drugs are.

To resist the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse, teenagers must set strict standards for themselves. Parties most commonly encourage drugs and alcohol, so to never go to them would be a smart choice. Also, one must choose the right friends; people who pressure others to take drugs or be irresponsible are not friends at all. A real friend will be supportive but will also tell their friends if they are doing something that is bad for them. A friend who cares will try to help them, not hurt them. First-hand accounts of the horrors of drug use can be powerful deterrents for teenagers. School programs that feature testimonials can be disturbing, but students need to see the reality of what drugs have done to people. The videos that Officer Scruggs of the Portland Police Department made show just how horrifying drug use really is. Every single addict who spoke in the videos mentioned how they lost friends, homes, health, money, trust and dignity. It is very important that young people are informed of the dangers at a personal level. Another drug addict, Robert, said, “It hasn’t done anything good in my life whatsoever.” Hearing statements like that and seeing the physical consequences of drug abuse is so powerful that only the most stubborn would ignore it. People trapped in drug or alcohol abuse need both love and help. The disease of drug abuse, as powerful as it may seem, can be overcome. Once people see just how terrible drugs and alcohol really are, society can be healed.

## **Make a Difference in Substance Abuse**

What can be done to make a difference in teen substance abuse? Are teens really prepared to deal with the decisions needed to be made in order to avoid temptation? With each passing year, the struggle teens face regarding the use of drugs and alcohol is rapidly increasing. To better prepare high school students to resist the influence of such substances, society needs to be informed of the risks, reasons, and questions surrounding substance abuse. Why are teens trying alcohol and drugs, what main factor influence this decision, and how can one resist and help others resist from using?

For many high school students, drinking and drug use go hand-in-hand, as do the factors which influence such behavior. High school life is full of pressure and stress. Whether it is from grades, low self-confidence, a poor social life, or a troubled relationship, teens are dealing with a strain and anxiety unlike any other. As stress and pressure intensifies, teens typically turn to drinking or drug use for relaxation. Unaware of any effects, teens assume drugs will only allow them to relax with no repercussions. Sadly, any feelings of a stress-free environment quickly fades, leaving the teen with even larger problems. Hardship at home is another common influence. When a family is having problems, it can cause added stress for a teen. Family problems can make a teen lose his or her concentration in school or even encourage the teen to use a substance to gain attention. Depression plays a large part in a teen's choices as well. Just as with the idea of stress relief, many young adults believe that drugs or alcohol will solve one's problems with depression. The truth is, though, substance use solves nothing. It only adds to the problem. Emotions are not the only factors. The desire to "fit in" or gain popularity is another large factor involving drug or alcohol use. A student's peers will mislead a teen into believing that drinking or using drugs will make one "cool." With the appetite for a larger social status increasing in modern society, a teen feels the need to do almost anything to gain popularity amongst his or her peers. Plus, with advertisements and the media portraying that alcohol is the cure for any problem, it's no wonder teens are experimenting or frantically searching for a thrilling experience. It seems there are many reasons as to why teens are trying drugs and alcohol.

It is obvious many factors influence a teen's decision to drink or take drugs, but which is the most common factor? The answer to this question is dependent on a high school student's situation. There is not just one main factor. On average, however, a student's desire to experiment with drugs and alcohol are based on the passion for popularity. Social rank appears to mean everything to a teen. For some, it can mean the difference between a memorable high school career or an unfortunate one. It is this unbelievable longing to "fit in" which drives teens to experiment with narcotics. It may begin as experimenting, but most teens are drawn into a possible lifelong battle with substance abuse. This battle could cause many problems in one's life which would typically begin with peers convincing a teen to just "try" or "experiment" drugs or alcohol.

How can one resist the influences and factors of substance use and abuse? How

can one prevent others from using drugs or alcohol? In all actuality, parents play the biggest and most vital role in teaching their children how to resist drugs and alcohol. Teaching children from a young age to avoid using substances reduce the chances of an experiment or addiction later on in life. Parents who present a strong and responsible attitude toward alcohol and drug use send influential messages to their children. Also, promoting a high self-esteem in children can also allow them to remain confident and be able to resist peer pressure. The community, media, and schools also aid in teaching teens to avoid influences. Information about drugs and their effects needs to be presented to children and teens to make them aware of possible outcomes. If the media could reduce or abolish any advertisements which manipulate teens into believing alcohol or similar drugs are popular or "cool," then the community would be doing its part in helping its people.

Teens can also help themselves in opposing influences. The first step in doing so is realizing that alcohol or drugs don't make one "cool." One should be judged based on character, not by what one consumes. The biggest step in helping oneself is by saying "no." This one word has all the power needed to live a healthy, independent, and responsible life. Saying one word can't be too difficult, can it? If it is too difficult, one can practice it in a mirror or before a big party. Practicing can help when a real-life situation occurs. One should avoid relationships with those who are older or are likely to influence one to make the wrong decision as well. One should spend time only with those who don't do drugs or encourage others to. Teens can also help their peers to stay drug and alcohol free. A student can let his or her friends know that they can say "no" as well. Teens can talk with their friends about the importance of making the right decisions. Students can also talk to one another when high school life is getting too stressful to deal with. In these ways, teens can resist the influences.

What can be done to make a difference in teen substance abuse? Everything can be done to make a difference. By preparing teens and helping peers, we can limit the amount of teens trying drugs and alcohol, we can change the factors, and we can help teens resist the influences. Society must encourage teens to make the right decisions but, ultimately, the decision to drink or use drugs is up to the teens themselves.

The chance of youth doing drugs and drinking these days is a high percentage. Even walking down the hallways I can hear stories of drinking Saturday night at so-and-so's party, or who sold who drugs. At my own school, I can hear talk from a close friend of mine, who sees the boy everyday who sold his little brother drugs. I wonder why parents and teachers haven't seen this. Don't you stop your own kid from going to that party hosted by a person you don't know? Don't teachers hear the talks of drugs and alcohol and try to stop it? Teens talking about their own experiences with drugs and alcohol seem to be everywhere. Myspace can even show pictures of high schoolers with beer cans, or a joint in their fingers and smoke billowing out of their mouth. It seems like the use of drugs and alcohol has become an epidemic. Teachers or parents may say it's all due to peer pressure, but I think that's a little overrated. Perhaps some kids start smoking cigarettes or drinking beer when they're around their friends, because of a comment like, "Come on, loosen up. We're all doing it, you should join in too." I think that's just a tiny factor is the reason behind some teens drug or alcohol use. The struggles in high school, with family, friends, relationships or just school in general is the main reason that some teens turn to drugs and alcohol. Not getting along with your friends, arguing with your family, desperately searching for some significant other for comfort, and that overload of homework; these are all reason that teens would turn to drug use or drinking. I think these factors would be a stronger push for drugs and alcohol would ever be.

Using alcohol or drugs can be an escape. You can forget about any of these problems that are floating through your everyday life and get to a place where you are a completely different person. The wallflower can become the life of the party. The girl who can't get a boys attention can finally catch the spotlight. You forget about your parents divorce, the fight you had with your best friend, or the chemistry lab due tomorrow that you haven't even started. I have to bet the most challenging factor is knowing what it's doing to your body, slowly. Knowing every substance that you're putting into your body is tearing every organ, putting poison in your blood stream, and killing brain cells with every drag, or every sip. The things that help me to resist these urges are strong ones. I know what my parents would think of me if they ever found out that I was doing drugs or drinking. I would be ashamed of myself. The people in my life are like anchors, keeping me held down, and I know if I was trying drugs or getting drunk, I would feel like I had let down the people closest to me. Drinking and doing drugs would be breaking my own moral code, and I know I could never live with myself, knowing what I had willingly done to my body.

Kids who want to drink, or do drugs should speak up. To describe the urges of why they want to do these things. Maybe just talking about the influences as to why they want to drink or do drugs could help them stop. Kids need to know what it will ultimately do to their body and their brain. Sometimes just hearing from some teacher, saying, "You could die from alcohol" doesn't help a teenager stop from wanting. Teens need to realize what effect it could have on them, their community and their family. Getting others who have battled addiction, who can help explain what it can do to your life, to your mental wellness, and your relationship with other people, could have such a strong impact on these kids. They need to know what it's down the road from choices they make. Teens who are thinking about using drugs and alcohol need to find the anchors in their life that will help them to make good, healthy decisions.