

The illegal and abusive use of drugs and alcohol in high schools is growing at an alarming rate. Students not only use illegal substances on weekends, but also before, during, and after school. This problem is becoming less recreational and more serious. Some students can learn by example and listen to other's warnings. However, those who turn their heads to others' words of wisdom have to learn their lessons the hard way.

As for myself, I was one of those people who didn't heed my friend's or parents warnings. Two years ago I was diagnosed with clinical depression. My doctor recommended, and prescribed Prozac (an anti-depressant). I decided the Prozac was just not working well enough for me so I began to self ~~medicate~~ myself. My substance of choice was alcohol, which I took in large, regular doses. It wasn't long until I had my own life lesson to tell and recover from. One night, as a result of too much alcohol, I blacked out and was sexually assaulted by three boys. From that moment on, I stopped my alcohol abuse and sought professional help.

My personal reasons for drinking were to fill a sad, emptiness I felt and to completely numb my body and mind from everything around me. Although many other high school students take part in substance use for that reason, many just drink for fun, to fit in, to relieve stress, or just because they're curious. There are also those who come from families of alcoholics. When you are surrounded by family members who use drugs and or alcohol, it is a way of life and you begin to think it is a normal behavior. In a study conducted by The Roper Public Affairs Division of GfK Custom Research North America¹, 65,511 kids in grades 7 through 12 were asked why they used drugs/alcohol.

The number one answer, with a whopping 73%, was because of stress. The second biggest reason was that teenagers abused substances to help feel better about themselves, and to look cool.

Factors that add pressure are peers and the media. The media portrays drinking and using drugs to be cool. Many of the people who drink and use drugs have low self-esteem issues, which drive them to do whatever it takes to fit in or feel needed. Numerous adolescents are incapable of coping with personal problems, ranging from life at home, to mental instabilities, so they mask and avoid dealing with them by turning to drugs and or alcohol. However, there are some abusers who have realized they want or need help, but have no idea who to ask, or where to go. I believe that if everyone knew about the available resources in their city, the abuse of drugs and alcohol would go down considerably.

If I could help every student in my city, I would. However, that isn't possible, so I try the next best thing, campaigning for support groups, getting information about help out to people who need it, and explaining to others how alcohol abuse affected me. We never know what message or action will prevent someone from engaging in the destructive behavior of drugs and alcohol abuse. Hopefully, my words and actions will help someone make good, healthy choices for themselves. I will continue to be a positive influence for my peers. Like Mr. Mersereau and Oregon Partnership I want to reach out to students by promoting support groups like Youth Line and be able to get information into the schools. If kids only knew that there were people just waiting for their call for help, their lives would change for the better.

Margaret Mead once said "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

¹ NOTES: the Roper Public Affairs Division of Gfk Custom Research North America conducted the survey for the Partnership for a Drug-Free America. The 2007 PATS survey was conducted in schools and in homes with a nationally projectionable sample of 6,511 adolescents in grades 7 through 12. The margin of error is +/-1.6%

For the Laura Mersereau Memorial Award Essay Contest

Influence. The single power drugs, alcohol, hold over us. Us, our friends, our families, our lives. The city we live in. The school we go to. They're a powerful, unwanted force that loves nothing more than to strike teenagers. The people I go to school with *everyday*.

It's not a fact I found on the internet. It's a truth. Off the top of my head, I can list at least fifteen people I know who've tried drugs. I can list many more who've gotten drunk. It's gotten to a point where friends I've known for a while, good, normal people, tell me they've done one or the other.

It's not a personal heart to heart confession either-they say it like they're telling me about getting a new video game. Like it's nothing new. Nothing important.

They've normalized doing it, and that's a seriously scary prospect.

When I was younger, I went through all the drug/alcohol prevention programs. I never truly thought situations involving drugs or alcohol would really appear in my life. It just didn't seem real. I knew about it of course, but I never had an encounter with it. Not until my freshman year of high school.

My friends and I were asked if we wanted to buy drugs. I remember us all giving each other freaked out looks, then politely said "no." We got as far away from the seller as we could get. Still, it was just one encounter. Nothing that really effected me much.

Last summer that all changed. Dramatically.

A close friend of mine tried drugs.

I don't know which one she tried. I do know she felt incredibly guilty about it. She talked about how angry she was at herself. I was so glad she told her parents so I didn't have to.

She ended up taking the same drug two more times.

When I asked why she took drugs, she replied that it was a number of things. Stress. She said she felt "so cool" taking it. "Grown up." It caused a massive blowout between her and another close friend of mine.

It destroyed their friendship.

Personally I doubt it was any of the three above. I think those are excuses. High school *is* stressful. I know, I'm in it. You have to get good grades. Colleges have lot's of students

competing to enter. There isn't any room for mistakes-not when summer school costs six hundred dollars.

The real reason I think she got high, the reason I think most teens get high, is because they're friends do it.

I know my close friend would never have tried drugs if the person offering it hadn't been a close friend. One she hadn't seen for a year.

This summer she found out he lived down the street. But it wasn't the kid I knew in middle school. He was more mature, sure. But he talked about drugs like it was candy. He even said he researched which drug was the safest!

I know if it had been any other person offering her drugs, she wouldn't have taken it. But she trusted him. She let him convince her it was ok.

Three times.

That's what I think happens to many teens. So many take drugs, it makes sense that people who use don't want to do it alone. The terms "peer pressure" but I doubt it's shown like it is in the anti-drug videos. I think teens use it around there friends, convince them it's alright to try it.

This summer also marks when the "Skate Park" was finished. It was made to be a safe place for people to skateboard, or let there kids play.

It become a hangout for druggies. Drunks. Every time I go I see bottles of alcohol. I've seen teens I knew who were so drunk they couldn't stand up. Fights break out. My brother can't go there because "older kids" are causing problems.

Suddenly the police are everywhere. Before that park was put in it was rare to see a cop near my neighborhood. Now, I see them drive down my street regularly.

The abuse of drugs and alcohol in my school is so high it's insane. It can change. Things can always change. I talk to my friends a lot, make sure they know my opinion about drugs and alcohol. Were I stand with it. Now-a-days there are many commercials against drugs, alcohol, but the only real effective one's I've seen are the *Above The Influence* commercials. I know they're effective, because people in my school remember them. They're talked about. They're not labeled as "dumb", or "stupid."

I'd love to create a program like that, or similar to that, were it made going against drugs and alcohol, fun. I'd be proud to wear an *Above the Influence* jacket, like they have in the commercials. I'd love to make, market, a symbol that was known to stand for people who are against drugs, alcohol, that teens would wear. A symbol that would become 'popular' amongst students.

Maybe even get the schools to get together, create an anti-drug/alcohol program. Make it a huge game. Like tag, or something similar. To raise attention that doing drugs, drinking alcohol, is not alright. Being against drugs and alcohol is not something that only crazy, over-protective soccer mom's do. It's something that needs to be stopped.

I want to try something, anything, that will make the amount of teens that use go down.

What about you?

Laura Mersereau Essay Contest

National statistics show that nearly fifty percent of high school seniors have used marijuana at least once and eighty percent have tried alcohol. These statistics are alarming because these illegal activities can lead to tragic and devastating effects for these students and their families. Unfortunately, I know students in my high school who use drugs and alcohol to fit in or try to feel better about themselves. I have had negative experiences as a result of drug use in my own family! My birth father made the mistake to use drugs as a way to escape his reality and ended up losing his children.

Students I know who have used drugs or alcohol seem to use it as a way to feel better about themselves and avoid the pressures of the real world. When I was a sophomore, I dated a girl who was very nice, but I learned later that she was also very shy, insecure and depressed. After dating for three months, she started to smoke pot with an old group of friends. After I found out what she was doing, I asked her to stop, but we broke up because she eluded to the fact that she liked herself better when she was high. I tried to help her see that she was a better person without the pot, but she didn't believe me. This was very hard for me because I really cared about her, but she didn't seem to care about herself. Sadly, she eventually dropped out of school. I know some students would have accepted her drug use and started smoking pot with her just to fit in and be with her, but this was something I couldn't do. I knew first hand how dangerous and devastating drug use could be!

Friends and internal pressures are the two biggest influences that lead teens to use drugs and alcohol. When I was younger, I always thought that a drug dealer who I didn't know would be the one to try to push drugs on me. Once I was in high school, I realized that the "pusher" would actually be someone I knew and might consider a friend. It would be much easier to say no to a stranger than a friend. High school students worry about what their friends think about them. Most teens want to seem cool to their peers and worry about what people would think if they said no. This leads to internal pressures to use alcohol or drugs. If teens feel they need to use to fit in or feel better, they can talk themselves into using drugs or alcohol even if they know they shouldn't.

I am able to resist the urge to use drugs or alcohol because I have seen and experienced the negative effects of having an addicted father. My birth father started using pot in high school, probably because he never felt very confident in himself. He had learning disabilities that made him feel insecure. Both my brother and I were born when our parents were young and our lives were never

easy. My parents fought, and my father continued to use drugs. When I was eight, my mother died of a rare lung disease. At the same time, my father's drug use escalated to using methamphetamines. He ended up caring more about getting high than about my brother and me! My birth father ended up losing us to foster care. Luckily, we were adopted and now have new, wonderful dad who does not drink or use drugs! I learned early that drugs can change who you are and not for the better! I share my story with my friends so they know how dangerous drugs can be. Most of my friends have not had this kind of experience, so this is always a powerful message. We also encourage each other not to use alcohol or drugs by accepting each other for who we are. We don't pressure each other to try to fit in or be cool. Instead, we encourage each other to have fun drug-free. For me, that's soccer, snowboarding, spending time with my friends, and being an Outdoor School high school leader. I encourage my friends to do what they love to do without drugs and alcohol!

My family is another big reason why I am able to say no to drugs and alcohol. They all care for me and love me more than anything else, especially my adoptive Dad. He always reminds me that drugs are dangerous and not to try them. We discuss my birth father and the mistakes he made so I will not make the same errors in judgment. I like that he "drills" this information into my head because I know that he cares about me, and it helps me make good decisions about drug and alcohol use. I am grateful that he is now my dad because he is a better role model than my old dad. My brother also helps me make good choices about not using. If I started using, I know he would be disappointed in me. I would also be a horrible role model to him and feel very guilty if he started using because of me.

In conclusion, I know teens in my school and community are using drugs and alcohol. This is an unhealthy and illegal decision. I know that it is hard sometimes being a teenager. We want to fit in and have people like us, but drugs are not the answer! Your real friends will like you for who you are and help you feel more confident in yourself. Parents need to remember to talk to their children about drugs and alcohol. My dad and I discuss why I should not use drugs or alcohol, and I do not want to disappoint him or myself! I know personally that a life with drugs is poisonous, and a drug-free life is full of hope and promise!

Your Future is Now

It's two in the morning and a silent, distressed household is awakened by the roaring sound of their doorbell. As an older man and woman fly out of bed and start down the stairs, their hearts begin to beat faster and faster. As they approach the door they look out the side windows to find two police officers standing there. The couple swings open the door and ask what's wrong.

As the officers begin to tell the man and woman the horrible news, the mother falls to her knees asking God, "why?" Like the mother, the father is weeping. Their daughter's short life flashes in front of their eyes, they have just received the worst news ever in their life. Their seventeen year old daughter, Lisa, just got in a car wreck after leaving a party, she was under the influence of crack cocaine and alcohol. Lisa died, including her best friend sitting in the passenger seat, and another friend in the back seat. A woman and her three children, who were passengers in the car Lisa crashed into, were killed as well. Lisa was graduating in two months, with a GPA of 3.5.

I have moved many of times. I have witnessed many things. I have seen teenagers pop pills like they are Skittles, take shots of vodka like vodka is the best tasting soda or juice ever made, smoke joints, as if joints make them smarter. Many of these teens walk away with a smile on their face like everything's going to be just great, as their emotions, happiness, and life slowly slips away.

It is true that many teens find joy in drinking, smoking weed, popping pills, eating shrooms, and the list goes on. They just don't realize the effects of these addictions. These addictions are taking over their emotions, their mind settings, tearing down their self-esteem, and ripping them away from their loved ~~ones~~ ones.

I live in Portland, Oregon. I have lived here for about nine months now. I constantly over hear my peers talking about their weekend drinking binges, and how they rolled the fattest blunt on Friday night. Of course I would ~~just be lying~~ like to think what

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my peers do has no effect on me, but then I would just be lying to myself. Also avoiding whats going to effect our world worse and worse for generations to come.

These days peer pressure is at its worse. Not just for drugs and alcohol, but for sex, popularity, and just fitting in with societies "normal" citizens. Besides the horrible effects of peer pressure, many parents have become bad influences, if not the worse. Some parents smoke and drink with their children, eventually instilling this outraged thought in their childs head that partying with your parents is alright. Which will lead to more parents partying with their kids, which possibly leads to their kids pressuring their peers to drink, because its "fun," or ~~not~~ whatever.

I have met many wonderful people with horrible addictions. Yes I love them. Do I adore them? No, I adore what they use to be.

I am not easily pressured to do anything I don't feel like doing. Yes, I have slipped. I have

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done many things I wish I hadn't done. Everybody has. But I have worked for a great present, and I'm working even harder for a future.

For all these teens falling in other people's foot steps, following wrong paths. Keep your head up. Think about the next time you are faced with the pressure of doing something that doesn't feel right. How are you going to feel tomorrow when the high is gone? If you even make it to tomorrow. Think about it. When your feelings are at there lowest point. When you feel you are getting no where in life, where and how far are drugs going to take you? Is the high going to make you successful? Is the high going to promise you a bright future? Is the high worth your precious time?

Substance abuse is a reality in every high school student's life whether they want it to be or not. You walk through the doors of your new school on your first day of freshman year, not knowing exactly who you are or who you will become. The influences of your peers will affect you more than you ever thought. The choices you make, and your ability to say "no, that's not for me", will be what directs you. Pressure fills the halls and classrooms of every high school in Oregon, not to mention the world. Each person's ability to deal with that pressure is completely different. A good support system of friends and family can help you get through obstacles that every student goes through. Something all freshmen should know is that the choices you make that year will help determine the success or failure of your high school career and your ability to succeed in life as a whole. When you reach high school the freedom hits you like an unexpected storm. You could choose to cover yourself with an umbrella, or you could walk in the rain and lightning hoping you'll come out okay in the end. Something I hear a lot is the classic "I'm so bored, I'll try anything once." When I hear that, I think, "Let's think of an activity, such as drawing, singing, sports, clubs and other various opportunities that high schools tend to offer." It's a good way to be active and make new friends, who are interested in the same things you are.

Unfortunately lots of teens love the risk taking that substance abuse provides. First of all using the substance is illegal, second of all being underage (when it comes to teens and the use of alcohol), and third of all how far you're willing to push yourself. For most high schools the curriculum health class is not until the later years of high school (Junior and Senior year). Realizing the affects of substances on the body is one thing that I can say made me take a big step back, and a big leap forward in the right direction. I never knew the whole story until my health class Junior year at Wilson High School. I'd seen certain friends I had grown up with turn to drugs and alcohol; it consumed them like a monster. It was no longer about coming over and hanging out watching movies or having nice talks; it was about seeing who could get their hands on a drink, weed, or even worse. I was never interested, and in turn lost some of the closest people to me; that was

something I've always feared, my self health, and last but not least getting in trouble. Knowing that I could have fun and get a sugar high legally was a much better option for me. In my Junior year health class one day, I found out we were having a guest speaker coming to talk to us about drugs, depression, and suicide. I thought, "wow another lecture." As I started to listen it was well presented and informative. Then he said that he was looking for Youthline volunteers, it was where teens help teens; a hot line that teens can call with any sort of problem. Whether they need a referral to a clinic, an open ear, or they are dealing with suicidal thoughts and feelings. In a world so big you feel like you are helpless. What can you possibly do to make a difference? Most people think nothing. Realizing how the relationships with friends I had once had had tragically changed, and how I always wished I could have done something about it, I felt like an invitation to do so was just handed to me. I took the informational sheet. It said that 50 hours of training were necessary to become a volunteer. I actually thought it was intriguing; could I possibly make a difference in someone else's life?

I decided to do the training and I enjoyed every hour of it. While working on Oregon Partnerships Youthline, I got to hear first hand the damaging effects that substance abuse causes. It was tragic. While spending time with that organization I also got to see what can happen to people when alcohol and drugs influence their lives; anything from being on the streets to homeless shelters and free clinics to an uncomfortable home life. The help is there and if everyone new about it we would all suffer less from the damaging effects. With Oregon Partnership, I took part in a film project in hopes to educate people throughout the Portland area and beyond with a short film explaining all the resources to people who are having issues. When you use substances it doesn't only affect you; it affects your loved ones and all the people who care about and surround you. The need to educate high school students and others about drug addictions is a low priority at my school, Health and drug education courses should not be in the last part of your high school career, but at the first part where everything is just starting to absorb in the mind. If a course was required each year, I think it would cause a great increase in students against substance abuse. In my high school only two semesters of health are required in order to graduate, and they are not to be taken until Junior year. Some students don't even get around to taking it until Senior year. By senior

year and beyond the damage is already done or has already started. In order to better the teens that are reaching out for help in the surrounding communities, and reach out to those who are need help but don't have the strength to confide in anyone, I will continue to work with Oregon Partnership in hopes of continuing to make a difference and encourage others to do so as well.

Life as a Teenager Tod

High school has changed a lot since you were a teen. Parents, teachers, and counselors are always trying to help, but sometimes they just can't, they just don't know what's going on. During an average day at school you are likely to get handshakes in the halls, be able to go off campus to eat lunch, and work with teachers that are really trying to help you. You also see kids that are smoking at the bus stop, or meeting up with the guy who sells weed. Teens my age are into drinking and drugs. I don't know many people my age that haven't tried tobacco, smoking or drinking. Let me tell you what it's like to be a teen these days.

You can find most teens have tried or used drugs or alcohol. One reason I feel that so many kids do drugs and drink alcohol is because they lack self confidence in themselves. So many teens use drinking to get "pumped up" before dances and football games because it helps them be bold and let go of their fear. They say that it helps them act wild and crazy or gives them the nerve to ask a girl to dance. I wish people would understand that at the end of the night taking drugs or drinking changed what you did, and not who you are. When I think about my city and school I think about where do all these kids get all the drugs and alcohol from? Parents, one of the most important things to remember is you can not leave alcohol around the house and leave teens alone. You also need to know that even medication can be used for drugs. As a varsity athlete I am well aware of other athletes and the things they do. I know that the medicine adderral is a big thing for male athletes. Adderral calms you and keeps kids focused that have a hard time paying attention, it is a prescriptive medicine and athletes or even friends don't know how seriously one dose could hurt you. They say it calms them before they are up to bat or going one on one in a wrestling match. So I think, "Will you always have to rely on this to perform well?"

I personally can resist the influences because it actually scares me. I don't want to lose control of myself I don't want to be waking up and not know where I am at. I have a friend that tells me stories of her friends who have gotten so drunk that they have lost total control and they wake up and fear they may be pregnant. They take another drug called "the morning after." I have found that people that don't do drugs and drink alcohol are respected way more than those that do. People tell me they respect me, but I remember when it felt awkward to go to a party and everyone was drinking and I wasn't fitting in. I would tell myself, "I am in control of what I am doing and they are not." (It gives me strength when I tell myself that.)

So parents, teachers, counselors, and all that care about youth, keep kids involved, don't let kids have too much time on their hands. Have them be busy whether it be a job, sports, or high school clubs. Take time to tell them what you think about drinking and drugs, don't leave us alone more just because we're older, can drive, and can take care of ourselves. I'm taking steps today to make a difference, by saying no to drugs and letting you know how life is as a teenager today.