

"I Choose to Make a Difference"

Entry for the Laura Mersereau Essay

We see them in school everyday...invisible people who are whispered about in the hallways, or have a high social status due to their popularity. Their behavior falls through the cracks, only to emerge into our perceptive view when their names appear in the paper and disappear from the class rosters. Who are they? He was the star of the football team. A senior with a full-ride scholarship, the envy of others, until the dream was dashed with a DUII arrest. She was involved in the choir until her parents got a divorce and she started missing school after becoming addicted to her mom's prescription medication.

The silent epidemic of substance abuse causes more social, economic, and health issues than any other preventable problem effecting my generation. One answer to the crisis is increasing awareness. With peers, parents, and schools working together, this can be a great start in changing attitudes and providing support.

Everyone has a role to play in the prevention of substance abuse. For the peers in my age group; no one is immune, no family is fully protected, and no attended school is unaffected from the consequences of substance abuse.

The reasons why high school students experiment with alcohol and drugs are as varied and unique as they are. There is peer pressure, the pain of dysfunctional families, and wanting acceptance of themselves and from others. Other reasons include experimentation, having fun without consequences, or escaping for even a little while from the daily pressures of everyday life. Therefore, by increasing awareness and talking about these problems with others of my own age, lives can be saved and dreams can be restored.

One roadblock however, are the zero tolerance policies in the schools of automatic student suspension. This enforces a code of silence among my peers. Instead of expelling students caught with drugs or alcohol, schools should send them to mandatory drug treatment programs and they could attend peer supported twelve step programs. In addition, students asking for help should be able to go to their counselors without fear of being suspended from school, or worry about permanent entries on their transcripts. Ignoring and not talking about the issue only makes the epidemic worse, especially since most drugs are so readily available, socially accepted, and easy to get.

Besides awareness, a difference can be made in substance abuse by sponsoring events such as "Red Ribbon Week" and "Student's Against Drunk Driving" assemblies. These events are great avenues to discuss this problem and to begin the conversation. I also feel that drug treatment information should be made available in school health centers and in the community. School and community education programs on substance abuse could be combined, since this is not an isolated issue, but one that affects everyone.

I feel the most challenging factor influencing substance abuse is the lack of family (especially parent) involvement and support. Most teens are not as fortunate as I, because I have very supportive parents who care about me and provide a strong moral base. Some of my peers are not so lucky, and they have to deal with dysfunctional family situations.

Not only do peers turn to drugs and alcohol because it is often a family norm, but without parental support, teens look to the mass media. Luring teens with suggestive movies, music lyrics, advertising and video games which increasingly fill the gap left by absent, non-involved parents. Media portrays cavalier attitudes regarding drugs and alcohol use, only amplifying the epidemic. The entertainment industry should enforce their own rules and send out more responsible messages to educate teens about the

dangerous consequences of drug and alcohol experimentation. Many teens often feel invincible and immune with attitudes like, "It can't happen to me," or "It's only one drink." Teenagers do not understand the addictive nature of tobacco and beer, and they often graduate to the next level of hard alcohol and drugs. They do this without realizing the consequences, and they are addicted before they realize it.

Then there is the right of passage of driving a car, which is so important to teenagers. For those under 18, I would institute a mandatory class on the causes and effects on teen drug and alcohol use, which must be passed before being allowed to get their driver's license. Not only would this raise my peer's awareness of the problem, but individuals who have suffered the consequences could teach or speak at such a class. I would also place basic information about using drugs and alcohol in the driver's manual and have more questions on the written test regarding the health and safety consequences (along with the physical effects on driving).

I would also ask that schools train teachers and councilors on how to recognize the signs and symptoms of drug or alcohol abuse in students; therefore, early intervention could occur. I feel this would keep many of my peers from dropping out of school. Such training would also help school staff in recognizing which students may be bringing drugs into the school environment, and help keep them off of the school grounds.

In summary, with better awareness campaigns, workable reporting systems, peer support and overall education, students have a much better chance at being socially responsible and making right choices. For those teens who have crossed the line into abuse, by tying into existing community treatment programs and working with the schools, they can learn to "say no" to drugs and alcohol. Let's all help in stopping this silent epidemic among young people! As for me, I choose to make a difference.

Drugs and alcohol. They're illegal substances for high school students, but that doesn't stop teenagers from using them. They cause more problems, but that doesn't discourage students from trying them. Illegal substances can cause a loss of brain cells, a loss of judgment, and can make a person feel indestructible, which can lead to someone getting hurt. So why would a high school student choose to abuse alcohol and drugs? They take drugs and drink alcohol to escape the pressure and problems of life, or simply because they want to try it. Alcohol and drugs are all around teenagers, but if they learn about prevention they can learn how it can destroy their lives.

The biggest reason for high school students to take drugs and drink is so they can mask their problems. They are at a complicated place in their life and they feel like life is never going to get better. They might have pressure from parents to be perfect and get into a good college. Maybe they are pressured by peers into taking drugs or drinking in the first place. Maybe they just broke up with their boyfriend/girlfriend and they don't know who, or what, to turn to. Maybe someone close to them died, or maybe they are having family issues. Whatever problem they are facing, they feel like it is too hard to deal with it. So they try to run away or hide from the problem by taking drugs or drinking alcohol. It makes them feel a false happiness when life is too stressful for them. They don't necessarily want to use drugs or alcohol but they don't know any other way to numb the pain. Then there are those who choose to purposely use illegal substances just because they can.

A lot of high school students take drugs or drink just to try it. They don't think anything will happen if they only do it once. But for some, once is all it takes to become addicted. Some continue to do it because they think that it is fun. They like feeling like they are as high as a kite, or in a parallel universe. Teenagers want more freedom and want to do what they want, when they want, especially if it is something their parents don't want them to do. They want to be rebellious and so they take drugs and drink alcohol. Others choose to try illegal substances because it is all around them in their daily lives. They see it in movies, at school, and even at home. At school everyone knows someone who drinks or takes drugs. Because it is all around them, students don't think that it is a big deal if they use them too. Even with drugs and alcohol practically everywhere there are students who resist the influence of illegal substances and help others to resist it too.

Substance abuse can be prevented. Students should put themselves in social and academic environments that discourage the use of substances and promote a healthy lifestyle. Students should be involved in recreational and extracurricular activities that they enjoy so that they don't feel the need to take drugs or alcohol to be worry free. If another student is leaning toward drugs and alcohol, help them to see that life is enjoyable without the help of illegal substances. Help them participate in positive social activities so that they don't have any need to use drugs and drink. Prevention programs, like ones involving families and schools, can help students stay clear of drugs and alcohol. Understanding the risks and making drugs and alcohol less accessible, will cause the number of students using illegal substances to go down.

Illegal substances are used by high school students to avoid the difficulties of life,

and just for the fun of it. Many teenagers feel that by taking drugs or drinking, they are only disrupting their own lives. But in fact, they are disrupting the lives of friends and family as well. Family and friends might feel guilty for not preventing the substance abuse. They want to help, but they don't want to push the student away by pressuring them. They might even feel like they are responsible for the reason why the student started taking drugs or drinking in the first place. Illegal substances only cause more problems for the community and cause people to lose friends for stupid reasons. High schools students need to live in loving, caring, nurturing environments so that they know that they have someone to turn to if they ever need to.

Substance Abuse - Scholarship essay

Our world is filled with harsh realities. People are not invincible. We are born, we live and we die. This is a natural process of life among humans. There are many compelling forces in our world. Some can be controlled, while others cannot. These forces can end ones life sooner than intended. Drugs are a controlled force. It is common knowledge that drugs can cause harm. People that abuse drugs can put their body at risk of many different ailments, they distort judgment and can ultimately ruin ones true sense of reality.

Abuser or user? Drug dependency is classified as a physical or psychological need to use a drug or another substance regularly, despite the fact that it is likely to have a damaging effect. They may become desperate, thus causing crime and financial ruin. Substance abusers cannot cope with their emotions properly. To cope they use the temporary pleasure induced effects of drugs. Drugs users ultimately fail with their emotions.

Moreover, it is important to remember that not all substance abuse is in the form of an illegal drug. In the past ten years there has been a significant rise in prescription drug abuse in both teens and adults. Substance abuse is on the rise more than ever before. People that abuse prescription drugs can cause harm to themselves from overdose, which can be lethal. Drugs that are deemed legal does not necessarily make it safe for the user.

There are potential factors that can raise one's risks of becoming dependent on drugs. If someone has a family history of addiction to legal and illegal substances than that person is at a greater risk than someone who does not. The community, and the family life that you live in can also effect your chances of becoming dependent on drugs. A parent's positive influence can help decrease the risk of a child becoming dependent. Poor or an abusive family life can give the child emotional and mental problems. Children that do not have a good support system and structure are more likely to get involved into crime and drugs. For these reasons, some abusers start earlier than others. In some families drugs, and or alcohol is deemed acceptable. The younger a person starts the odds are not in the favor of a full recovery. These multitude of factors are ultimately the components of addiction.

The cure? While there is no quick vaccination to prevent substance abuse, education is the best treatment. Reality is prevention and empathy is prudent. Parents must become the positive role model for their children. However, problems with this can occur. Parents work to feed the family, come home, say a quick few words, send the children to school, and it starts all over again. Although this is not the same for every family it is important to look at the reality of most working American families in the Unites States. Parents often do not have the time to take classes on informing their children, the resources are there, but the convenience is not. Education for parents needs to more easily assessable for parents to get the necessary information they need.

Substance abuse is wasteful to a promising generation of youth. Can you imagine living on welfare without a proper family to go to? This is the harsh reality that my aunt lived with for years. Growing up was hard on her and my father. They both grew up

without a proper father (who would only visit every four years or so) and without the caring attentive mother (who was an alcoholic). At the age of ten my aunt started smoking cigarettes and at the age of fourteen smoked marijuana. When she was thirteen she became pregnant with her first child and had all four children by the age of eighteen. After her first divorce she came to use heroin and inhalants, thus ending any relationships she had with her children. It is unfortunate that such a youth was wasted in such a little period of time. Today she is drug free and a recovered alcoholic, but her children no longer see her and wish nothing to do with her. This goes to show that with life comes the harsh reality of poor decision making, and for some take drugs and alcohol as a choice has damaged them forever.