



It Doesn't Always Just Affect You

By Nicole Johnston

THE DREAM most young women have is to get married and have a family, but that rarely happens if you decide to use drugs. When women decide to do drugs, they rarely think about anything other than themselves. They don't realize how using drugs affects their thinking and decision-making. When their immediate goal is to get their next high, their ability to make a rational decision goes out the window. They will do anything to get more drugs, which can lead to sleeping with people they don't know. In an addict's mind, drugs are more important than the baby. They aren't even thinking about the baby. They aren't thinking about what kind of life the baby will have. They are only thinking about the drugs.

There are several things that can happen to the fetus of a drug addict. The most severe consequence is that the fetus can die of overdose just like an adult can. If the fetus survives, as it nears birth the baby will begin to show signs of distress. Babies born to drug affected mothers are

often born premature and small in size with a low birth weight. Any baby born premature will have their own medical issues and extra needs, in addition to the effects of the drugs. Some other common issues with drug affected babies is delayed motor development, cardiac defects, and difficulty swallowing.

Once the baby is born it is a whole new battle. If the baby tests positive for drugs they are automatically taken away from the mother, and put into foster care. If they test positive for drugs, they will also go through withdrawals. Withdrawal symptoms include seizures, sweating, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and intense pain throughout the entire body. The baby will be unable to soothe itself so it will need swaddling and constant physical contact to help soothe. A baby that goes through withdrawals will cry excessively. Some grown adults don't make it through rehab because it is too hard but the baby is going through the same effects. There isn't a rehab for babies!

The consequences of a child who has been exposed to drugs do not go away with age. Some of the more common issues are learning disabilities, developmental delays, poor hand eye coordination, short attention span, and hyperactivity. With the learning disabilities, it isolates them from their peers because they are learning at a slower rate and can't keep up with kids their own age. Another issue that is common in school age children is the disruption caused by a shorter attention span and hyperactivity, also isolating them from their peers.

Has anyone guessed that this is my life story? I was a baby born to a drug addict and went through all of these things firsthand. I was the one with the withdrawals, and was put into foster care. I am the one with learning disabilities that set me aside from my peers. I am 18 years old and I still suffer the consequences from my mom choosing to do drugs while she was pregnant with me. It is far from an easy life that I am forced to live because of a decision that I didn't even make. It was my mom who made that decision for me.

Experiencing the consequences of my mom doing drugs while she was pregnant gives me a dead set path that I am GOING to follow. I am never going to touch a drug in my life. One good thing that my life has instilled in me is a strong ability to say no to drugs. I will never put my future children or myself at risk. I will be the mother that takes care of her children myself, not having them go through foster care and then being adopted.

Overall drugs are bad for you but if you are a woman doing drugs while pregnant it isn't just bad for you it is also literally toxic for your unborn child. I am extremely blessed and grateful for the way things were handled. If I wasn't taken away from my birth family, I would have been a drug addict myself and I wouldn't have met the best foster mom and the best family a girl could ask for. I have the strongest adoptive parents and the best adoptive family. I hope that you can take something away from my story and think about the consequences before you do drugs because it doesn't always just affect you. ☹️

ALERT SCHOLARSHIP

Nicole Johnston is a recent high school graduate from Idaho. *Alert Magazine* congratulates her for winning the Alert Scholarship and we encourage her in the pursuit of her academic goals. We would also like to encourage future seniors to participate in our scholarship program.