



Our Choices Impact Other People

By
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“WHAT started out as a fun weekend thing eventually spiraled down.” This scenario is really common to hear. Alcohol has always been a temptation for many teenagers including myself, when we want to fit in; to get together for fun and laughter with friends supercedes all. The sad part is that we're really not aware of the risks and dangers of alcohol and drug use when we start out. My response is that we have to start talking to kids at a younger age.

Drugs and alcohol in my family nearly destroyed the dreams I had for myself when I was just a kid. First, when I was eleven, my older step-brother introduced me to buying and selling drugs. I was alone a lot and it made me feel part of something. Around that same time, my dad, an alcoholic, offered me beer to try with him at home. When my own parents offered to give me a drink, it made it easier to drink with my friends. We both knew it was against the law, but they had made it seem like it was acceptable and okay. During middle school, my normal routine would be to hang out at friends' homes after school; we'd play basketball in the afternoon and smoke pot after dinner. We bonded, made jokes and just had a lot of fun together. On the weekends we would drink. I began couch surfing and staying away from home more.

Usually, I would go to school because that's where my friends were, but I remember one time of skipping school for a whole week because my mind was too impaired. I had been labeled Emotionally Disturbed; yet it seemed like I was the target for the school staff to shoot at every day. They'd catch me with my hood up or head down, inappropriate language, fighting, insubordination, disruptive conduct and truancy. Each time I was either given a detention, an in house suspension, or an out of house suspension; once I was expelled for 40 days! I didn't think my education really mattered to anyone, so it didn't matter much to me either.

In 8th grade, Mom left us and Dad began drinking more. His next poor choice was to drive after drinking, which got him a DUI. That led to being cited as undocumented, taken to jail, and soon deported. All he had gained in the past twenty years was lost. I never saw my dad again after that night and I was only a sophomore in high school. That experience made me think more seriously about the use of alcohol and drugs. I was never taught the dangers of alcohol or that it was harmful to my body. If I knew then what I know now, I would never have started it. Alcohol can damage short and long-term brain growth and cause learning problems as it did for me, because it's a fact the brain is still

growing into the early to mid-twenties.

We don't grow when things are easy though; we grow when we face challenges and work through them. I decided that year I wanted more for myself. I had missed a lot of education throughout my eight elementary school years because I was always being removed from the classroom. Math is especially hard for me now because I lack some of the foundational concepts and skills. I know the drugs and alcohol I used messed with my brain some, but I started working hard to achieve a respectable GPA so that I would be a strong college candidate. I got involved in football and played all four years; I made the high school JV basketball team; I joined the Key Club (a community based service club) and started volunteering every month. I've learned how a person's choices can significantly impact other people and not just themselves. It hasn't been easy, but I hope on a personal level that I make choices I can be proud of so I won't have to look back on my life with regrets.

It's important to identify the cause of alcohol and drug use to develop effective programs to prevent teenage use. Parents should start at home, letting their kids know it is not okay; it is not right, and it's extremely harmful. Removing me from the classroom and isolating me was not an effective way to help me make better choices. What I needed was somebody to take the time and show they cared enough to find out "why", what's behind my negative behavior? I think listening to a current alcoholic or a drug abuser talk, one who is suffering right now from the consequences of consuming drugs and/or alcohol, would make quite an impression on kids today; our choices really do impact other people. 🚫

ALERT SCHOLARSHIP

Javi Euan is a recent high school graduate from Oregon. *Alert Magazine* congratulates him for winning the Alert Scholarship and we encourage him in the pursuit of his academic goals. We would also like to encourage future seniors to participate in our scholarship program.