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Alcohol and Drugs

I came from a big, close family. We were all involved in lots of activities—sports, music and drama. With 30 cousins, there was always a game to attend, a play to watch or a concert to go to. One cousin got into alcohol and drugs. It hurt our whole family to see what he had to go through—the steps of rehab and therapy necessary to fight the addiction. So as a kid, I was pretty good about staying away from alcohol and drugs.

I didn't have my first drink until I was 18 years old and a freshman in college. I was not supposed to do any drugs—or I would have to give up my government scholarship—so the fear factor kept me from ever using any drugs. I sure didn't want to risk losing that scholarship.

I remember my first drink was a beer. I thought, "What could be more disgusting tasting?" It was so bitter. And anything that smelled of alcohol reminded me of all those trips to the hospital as a kid. So I decided to try something very sweet tasting—like sweet wine.

Well, my first experience with drinking sweet wine got me very drunk. It was not the great feeling people told me it would be, it was frightening. I could not walk or talk right. My head started hurting, and instead of being in the mood to party, I ached to go home. The next day, I woke to find a big bruise on my arm from falling down. Things were blurry from the night before. When friends reminded me of slurred speech and tripping on the sidewalk, I said, "I did that?" It terrified me.

For a while I did not drink again. Then I went to a fraternity party. One of the most popular girls on campus talked me into this drinking game. It was the first (and last) time I gave into peer pressure. They would take you to each room and make you quickly drink a shot of liquor. Each room had a different theme and different type of drink. The idea was to get completely drunk.

Everything was spinning while I tried to walk home. I threw up all night long. It was horrible. I am sure that I had alcohol poisoning. It took me days to recover. I was so sick. I missed classes. I couldn't eat. I was so embarrassed.

It was easy not to drink anymore. It was clear that, while going out with friends, I enjoyed myself much more when I felt aware and in control of everything going on around me. One night of supposed "fun" was definitely NOT worth the days of pain and embarrassment afterwards.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Aimee had a bad experience the first time she drank alcohol. What made her try drinking again?
2. Have you ever given in to pressure from friends? What made Aimee start thinking for herself?

America is addicted to alcohol and drugs. For real. By the time you are in high school, you'll probably feel pressure to try all kinds of crazy stuff—inhalants, beer, marijuana or liquor. You're going to have to make some tough decisions about whether or not you're going to mess with that stuff. What you need is not a lecture to "just say no"—end of story. You need the knowledge and power to make that choice for yourself. You need to decide to take care of yourself—no one else can.

So here it is—the short scoop on drugs and alcohol. They have a few things in common. First, they all wage a war on the natural balance of your body and mess up the way your most important organs do their job. Take inhalants for example—they interfere with the oxygen and chemical balance of your lungs, brain and blood. It might seem harmless to sniff glue or hair spray for a quick high—but what huffing can do to your body (hearing loss, spasms, brain damage and even death) is no joke. Every drug sneaks into your body and screws it up.

Secondly, all drugs and alcohol are addictive. Some of them actually make your body crave them in a way you have no control over—like alcohol, heroin or meth. Others, like dope or mushrooms become something that you do over and over again until it becomes a habit because it tricks your mind into thinking it feels good. Once you try a drug—even one that might seem harmless, like snorting your sister's prescribed Ritalin—you body will never forget it.

Alcohol and drugs affect everyone differently. You never know exactly what's in it or how strong it is. Some kids feel tense and panicky. Sometimes it makes you drowsy. Kids who drink and do drugs a lot are moody, always tired, cranky, not interested in school or sports anymore, and get in lots of fights. When you are drunk or high, you kinda lose your mind. It can make you do things you regret—like saying things you don't mean, getting into trouble, even sleeping with someone you hardly know.

Lastly, drugs and underage drinking are illegal. As in, get caught and go to jail; as in, waving to mom and pops through steel bars; as in getting kicked off your team and expelled from school. Get the picture? It's not cute.

Want the truth? There is no room for drugs or underage drinking in your life if you're an athlete. An athlete's body is sacred—they can't afford to mess with coordination, memory or the rate of their heartbeat. When you feel the pressure to take a drink, a hit, huff a whippet or drop a tab, stop and recognize. Recognize what you would be doing to your body and mind. Recognize that a friend that tries to pressure you to hurt yourself is lame and not really a friend at all. Recognize that you have the power to control who you are and what you do. But most of all, recognize that you have a choice. Choose you.

EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- * There are many ways to feel good without using alcohol and drugs.
- * Go with what you are good at—art, music, sports, cooking, writing—it feels good and it's safe.
- * Help a friend—talk to her, let her know you care, offer to go with her to get help.
- * Look in the blue pages of the telephone book for numbers of help places to call.
- * Find friends who don't drink alcohol or take drugs. There are a lot of them out there.

RESOURCES

www.al-anon.org/alateen
www.drugfreesport.com
www.freevibe.com
www.ncadd.org
www.straightscoop.org
www.whatsyourantidrug.com