



LAKE COUNTY NARCOTICS AGENCY

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P.L.U.S.² Parent's Guide Lesson 6 Personal Risks of Drug Use

This week class begins with a “brick wall”. The *wall* is built on the board by the students and consists of the risks and consequences of drug use. The foundations of the wall are the categories from the homework of “You,” “Friends,” “Family,” and “Parents.” The students take turns writing risks into the *bricks* on the wall based on the answers from their homework.

Risks to health.... Health encompasses multiple aspects of our lives, including physical, mental, emotional, and social. The students easily come up with examples of health risks related to drug use such as: illness, cancer, brain damage, addiction, accidents, and death.

Consequences of drug use can take many forms when it comes to adolescent health. Drug abuse can potentially affect every major system in the body. Depending on the drug of choice, some damage or impairment may be temporary while other drugs cause permanent, irreparable harm. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), drugs contain chemicals that tap into the brain’s communication system and disrupt the way nerve cells normally send, receive, and process information. There are at least two ways that drugs cause this disruption: (1) by imitating the brain’s natural chemical messengers and (2) by overstimulating the “reward circuit” of the brain. *The Science of Addiction: Drugs, Brains, and Behavior* (<http://www.drugabuse.gov/ScienceofAddiction/>). NIH Pub. No. 07-5605. Bethesda, MD: NIDA, NIH, DHHS, 2007. Either way the consequences can be devastating.

Mental health problems such as depression, slowed development, apathy, and social withdrawal frequently are linked to substance abuse among adolescents. Youth who are using drugs are at higher risk than nonusers for mental health problems including conduct problems, personality disorders, suicidal thoughts, attempted suicide, and completed suicide. Marijuana use, which is prevalent among youth, has been shown to interfere with short-term memory, learning, and psychomotor skills. Teens who abuse drugs may also engage in behavior that places them at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases, possibly as a result of injecting drugs and sharing used needles, or often as a result of the brain’s inability to process adequate judgment and maintain impulse control. Youth are more likely to engage in sex and risky sexual behaviors while experiencing the effects of mood-altering drugs.

Certainly the majority of teens who abuse drugs have declining grades, miss more school and other activities, and have an increased potential for dropping out of school. This process doesn’t happen quickly so it’s easy as a parent to overlook that drug use might be at the root of the problem.

Risks to friendships and relationships.... Loss of friendships, arguments, breaking up, divorce and loss of trust are common consequences added to the wall by the students. Drug use can have an intense impact in the lives of those who care about the user. Teens who abuse drugs often become isolated by their peers and may separate themselves from school, extra curricular activities, and community activities.

For teens who don’t use drugs, the best advice is to avoid having close friendships and/or spending time with the kids who do. Experts agree that association with drug abusing peers is often the most immediate risk for exposing adolescents to drug abuse and delinquent behavior. *Get Smart about Drugs: A DEA Resource for Parents: Social Consequences of Drug Use* <http://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.com/identify/social.html> (9/2012)

Risks to family.... Lies, loss of trust, loss of custody of kids, abuse, and fights are some of the effects on family that the students add to the wall during class. Substance abuse affects every aspect of a family. Teens that use drugs withdraw from their family members and family activities, and often set bad examples for younger siblings. Because their judgment and decision-making ability becomes greatly impaired, they may become more aggressive toward family members and even steal from them to get money for drugs.

What parents see as risks.... Parents consider the current risks as well as the possible future risks more often than their children do. Substance abuse can lead to many poor decisions including those that result in legal problems. Having a criminal record can have lifelong implications! Certain types of work are not an option for someone with a criminal record; a person may not be able to get a job in the armed or police services, in security or public services, or in business or industry.

"Adolescent drug use is linked with poorer occupational and job quality outcomes as much as 10 years after high school. Interestingly, which job-related outcomes are affected by early hard drug use varies by gender. Females who use hard drugs as adolescents end up in lower skill, lower status jobs, while males who use hard drugs as adolescents are more likely to end up in jobs with fewer benefits (e.g., health care, retirement)." *"High School Drug Use Predicts Job-Related Outcomes at Age 29," by Jeanne S. Ringel, Phyllis L. Ellickson and Rebecca L. Collins, published in Addictive Behaviors, volume 32, number 3, March 2007*

Results from another study suggest that "some forms of adolescent substance use limit socio-economic opportunities, and have a lasting effect on health, consequently decreasing life-satisfaction." *"Are Adolescent Substance Users Less Satisfied With Life as Young Adults and If So, Why?" by Laura M. Bogart, Rebecca L. Collins, Phyllis L. Ellickson, and David J. Klein, published in Social Indicators Research, volume 81, number 1, March 2007*

Taking down the wall.... Once the bricks have been filled and the *wall has been built by drug use* the officer facilitates discussion about the **person behind the wall**. The conversation focuses on the physical, social, and emotional obstacles created by drug use. The officer allows students to come back up to the *wall* and erase some risks that would disappear once drug use stops. Unfortunately, some bricks stay on the board, as there is some damage that cannot be repaired even when a person quits using. The students are aware of the separation that drug use causes with family, relationships, and friends. Obviously, life is much healthier without drug use. Staying away from drugs completely is a much better option! But once drug use has begun, stopping is a vital decision to be made hopefully sooner than later.

Research has shown that youth who avoid marijuana use have "more parental support, devote more time to homework, spend more time in extracurricular school activities, earn better grades, get into less trouble and are emotionally better off...." In the same study, by the age of 23, those who had avoided marijuana in high school functioned better overall as young adults than those who had experimented with it in their youth. "Compared with experimenters, abstainers were better educated, were happier with their friends, and were less involved in deviant behavior (stealing and drug selling).... Youth who experiment with marijuana are worse off in many respects than those who abstain throughout their teen years." *J. S. Tucker, P. L. Ellickson, R. L. Collins and D. J. Klein, "Are Drug Experimenters Better Adjusted Than Abstainers and Users?: A Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Marijuana Use," published in the Journal of Adolescent Health, volume 39, number 4, 2006, pp.488-494.*

P.L.U.S.² Homework this week: *The Last Time We...Checklist*

This week's homework is for you and your child to do together. Some families have traditions, spontaneous fun happens at other times... Do your children still enjoy camping? Fishing? Baking with you? Have you asked them? Here is homework for you to uncover what your son/daughter truly enjoys and what he/she has perhaps outgrown. That is the fun portion of this assignment. The back side of the homework might prove to be a bit more challenging! What serious topics have you discussed with your child recently? Which topics would you like to give more attention? The purpose of the homework is NOT to talk about all of these issues at once, but to provide a map of conversations to have with your child as you choose to do so.

Your conversations with your children about serious issues are the most powerful way to get messages to them about making safe, healthy decisions. The research is clear... Kids who learn about the risks of drug use *from their parents* are less likely to use drugs.

Don't forget....you can get homework, Parent's Guides and much more information at our web site:

www.lakecountyohio.gov/lcna.

You need to login in with your username and password to see the homework and Parent's Guides.

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