

OUR KIDS AND DRUGS

John Vawter

* HELPFUL TRUTHS LEARNED ALONG THE WAY

1. Lying and deception...therefore, truth is necessary
2. Rebellion, fun, medicating pain
3. Taking responsibility
4. Addict logic
5. H-A-L-T
6. I did not cause it, I cannot cure it and I cannot control it
7. Temperaments: Their impact on stress
8. One day at a time
 - * Prodigal son (Luke 15)
 - * **The Prodigals and Those Who Love Them**, Ruth Bell Graham
 - * God's compassion, Psalm 103:8-13
 - * Hopelessness, Jeremiah 29:11
 - * The good shepherd, Isaiah 40:11
 - * Focus on God or the Problem
 - * Honesty—dealing with temptation
 - * Four areas of stress: emotional, spiritual, social, physical
9. Support groups

* ALARMING AND COMFORTING RESEARCH DATA

Barna

- 17 % of pastors' kids
- 21 % of church kids use or have used
- 75 % of pastors did not go for help

Not Alone

- Parents were not blamed by abusing kids
- 15 was average age for experimenting
- 5 years usually passed before a problem was realized

* THE HELPFUL WEBSITE (www.notalone.org)

* THE PATH TO PARENTAL HEALTH (next page)

THE PATH TO PARENTAL HEALTH

EIGHT RESPONSES MANY PARENTS EXPERIENCE

Attendees at *You're Not Alone Conferences* have done follow-up conferences with Dr. Steve Nicholson, an anthropologist and former college president. As he talked to parents and listened to what they were saying, Dr. Nicholson began to discover a process of recovery/growth for pastors whose kids abuse drugs or alcohol. In some ways this process is similar to what Kubler-Ross discovered about the process of death and dying. After Dr. Nicholson did his study, we shared his thinking with other parents of kids who have abused or are abusing. They added further insights.

Our initial research, though incomplete and anecdotal, suggests eight common responses that parents of an abuser of alcohol or drugs may have on their way to becoming healthy enough to leave the issue in God's hands and quit ruining their own emotional and spiritual health. Granted that every parent does not follow the same path or even experience all of these responses, the research has some validity and will help parents understand where they are and where they need to get for the sake of their own health. Furthermore, depending on the age of the child, responses can be different for each parent. In fact, parents may experience two or three responses at the same time.

Dr. Nicholson noted these eight responses as being common for parents of abusers:

Denial

Denial is not seeing or admitting the evidence of our child's abuse of drugs or alcohol. Certainly any denial is exacerbated by the intense feelings of grief and loss the parent experiences.

Realization

To accept the fact that our kid is abusing drugs or alcohol is very difficult. We did not rear him/her this way. We are afraid for the future. However, acceptance of the reality allows us to get the help we need for our own emotional and spiritual health.

Shock

The shock of the reality can be described as a huge energy-draining phenomenon that impacts the parent greatly. The shock is so intense it often immobilizes the parent and keeps him/her from fulfilling normal family and work responsibilities. In some cases, the pain and shock are so debilitating that the parent feels like quitting on God, quitting the ministry, or lashing out at God in anger.

Enabling

Parents of drug/alcohol abusers often enable because they love their children and want the best for them. We enable when we cover and make excuses for the abuser and don't let them face the consequences of their actions. However, enabling must be stopped. Although their motives are pure, the effect of their actions is to deny the abuser the responsibility of seeing the error of his/her ways.

Anger

Anger—or misdirected anger—can be directed at many targets: the child, the drug dealer, society, one's spouse, or the church that is not sensitive to the pain of the pastor. Nevertheless, the parent must assume responsibility for his/her own anger and deal with it. If left unchecked, the anger is very destructive. It has been said, "Hurt feelings only hurt us in the end." The same is true with our anger.

Acceptance

Acceptance means we begin to apply the three C's: (1) I did not cause this; (2) I cannot cure this; and (3) I cannot control this. When we get to this stage, we begin to reach out to God and ask for His intervention in the life of our child. The parent comes to the realization of what he/she can and cannot control. We accept the fact of our child's abuse. This realization allows us to pray harder and focus more of our energy on our own spiritual, emotional and mental health, while asking and trusting God for His intervention in the life of our child.

Marital Tension

Often parents are challenged in relating to one another. Our basic temperaments cause us to respond or react to our kid's abuse in different ways. Our reactions and responses may vary across a broad spectrum: from practicing faith and feeling peace to wanting to control everything and feeling worried. If these temperament differences are not recognized and dealt with as soon as possible, the parents' marriage can suffer.

Faith: Loving the Addict but Leaving Him/Her in God's Hands

We begin to get our life in order; we realize that we can trust God with the life of our child. Reaching the stage of trusting God is a tortuous journey, but we cannot give up hope. Some call this response "detachment." The parent does not quit loving or caring for the child. Detachment simply means the parent is learning to trust God and not be controlled by the abuser's actions. We find we must take one step forward and two steps backwards along the path to this response of faith. As long as we understand that this is a goal, then we have something concrete to hang on to when the pain and grief are particularly intense or we are not doing so well in trusting God. When we reach the highest level of this response, peace returns and anxiety, fear, and hostility melt away. We trust the God Who loves our child more than we do to keep working in his/her life.