

I live in a small community and attend an even smaller school. But no matter what the size is, the effect of drugs and alcohol is devastating. I am 17 and I know all too well the effects of drugs and alcohol. They don't just hurt you and your body; they hurt the people around you, those who care for you the most. They change who you are, you lose control of what you used to be able to handle, and you will no longer be in charge of your life.

I believe that high school students drink and take drugs to escape, but the problem is that by filling yourself with temporary satisfactions is the after effect. You feel no better than before you took or drank what ever it was, and you are more likely to feel worse. Drugs ruin your chances at a good life, and sometimes it can even take it.

I had a friend in elementary school, and I know people change, but I didn't think a change could be that drastic. His name is Cody and I had known him since 2nd grade. My elementary school only went to the 5th grade and after that most went to the public middle school, I however, was blessed by the chance to attend a small private school. But as I mentioned before I come from a small community and even if you don't see people you once knew you are bound and determined to hear about them some how, some way. And Cody was one that was talked about for quite some time. One night at the public high schools dance, Cody drank one too many beers, not that he should have been drinking in the first place, but he went into a mad rage and destroyed the men's bathroom. Police arrived and took him to jail. He ruined his reputation, his body, and his integrity because he couldn't resist drinking.

Drugs and drinking has also affected my family. When my cousin was about four she was raped by her step father. He was drunk and took advantage of her, and her mother was too high to stop it, and then she couldn't remember and chose her husband over her daughter whose innocence was stolen. I still remember the nights when she would wake up screaming and crying in fear that he would come after her again. Her step fathers drinking and her mother's careless addiction have permanently scarred a little girl, who will never be the same.

But just this last year something struck even more closely to home. A young man just out of high school shot and killed another man over a drug deal gone wrong. That young man attended my school for quite some time, and now he will spend most of his life in jail serving a sentence he did deserve, over a drug that would only temporarily help him escape what was really hindering his life.

I have never done drugs and I will never allow something that devastating and harmful enter my "temple" as the Bible calls it. The Bible also says, "do not allow anything defiling enter your temple", temple meaning body. I want to be pure for my entire life and drinking and taking drugs won't allow me to do that. I want to live my life to the fullest and be able to make my own decisions. I think if I were put in the position of trying to prevent a friend from using alcohol or drugs I would probably have to tell them, "I want to see you be successful and live as long as possible. I want to see you do great things, and when you give into temptation and drink or do drugs, you are harming your chances to be all that you want to be and more".

Drugs and drinking not only affects you, but the people around you. It hurts your community and takes many lives every year. I believe that young people all over the world should abstain from drinking and drugs, not only while in high school, but when they are older too. I want our nation of young people to be able to make their own

decisions and become everything that they want to be and staying away from drinking and drugs can make all that happen and more.

On a Sunday morning in Oregon City, lush green cliffs overlook the cascading falls. Clean, small business buildings shimmer in the sunlight, showcasing their goods. But less than a mile up the hillside people are desperate for relief. Financial funds being scarce, stress wraps its cold hands around the heads of families who wonder how to provide for their children for another week. Though they try their best to keep their children sheltered from the calamity they face, older siblings cannot help but sense the desperation and panic of their circumstances. They too feel the emptiness of uncertainty and cannot handle it.

Circumstances like these are often the cause of a high school student's addiction to drugs, alcohol or both. When storms rage constantly around him, all he wants is a safe crevice of shelter to huddle into to forget the chaos of reality. Drugs and alcohol offer these crevices of shelter and in the raging storm he feels it would be foolish not to try these sources of momentary comfort. So despite all he has learned about drugs and alcohol and the terrible effects, he is curious to know what he is missing.

Curiosity is the other extreme motivation to consume alcohol and drugs. Teenagers are naturally curious especially when there are closed doors. Society tells teenagers strongly not to "do" drugs or alcohol; these blatant commands build up a rising question of "why"? Therefore, when there is an opportunity to explore these possibilities with heavy consequences if they do not, they often do. They enjoy the invigorating feeling it gives them, so they continue whenever possible; little do they know that with every dose, they are spiraling further downward into slavery.

I have been taught from a very young age the long-term horrors of drugs and alcohol abuse so I recognize no matter how bad things seem, picking up either of them will not solve, but worsen matters. I also recognize the fact that there is always hope, no matter how disastrous events appear. There is always something productive to do and learn in every situation. If more teens viewed situations as opportunities to grow, perhaps teenage substance abuse would lower.

In order to prevent others from resorting to this dangerous method of comfort, I as well as others need to take some definite steps, the first of which is simply being a friend. To have a friend is to have a jewel because a friend will do all he can to help his friend; many teenagers come from broken homes where love is not a daily ritual. To have someone who really cares about them, regardless of their own feelings, someone they can trust with anything lifts great burdens from their shoulders. Secondly, we must listen to them and understand their hopes, fears, problems and triumphs. When they seem overwhelmed, we must make sure we understand what they are going through and offer an alternative way to release stress. For example, if my friend came to me and said she was depressed, I would not tell her "That's too bad." and push her back out into the storm; I would invite her to come play tennis with me after school. If we can find productive nerve-calming alternatives to drugs and alcohol, perhaps these substances would not be such a problem.

Teenagers have good reason to search for a resting place in times of peril, but there are so many other ways to have fun that have no lethal consequences. By helping those who might be in hardship, and therefore fostered thoughts of drugs or alcohol, see the hope in life and the fun to be had even in the midst of thunder and

rain we can diminish the devastating effects of substance abuse. There is hope. By supporting those who fear for tomorrow, we show them they can handle life without drugs or alcohol.

LAURA MERSEREAU ESSAY CONTEST

Drug and alcohol abuse is rampant in Oregon. It has no preference between rich or poor, black or white. A demon to both the young and the old. It is like a tornado that starts out small and sucks everyone in. Not just the user, but everyone around them. Destroying and hurting the innocent along the way. Found in both good neighborhoods and band. It can affect any family, I know because it affected mine.

I strongly believe that peer pressure is the main reason students try their first drink or drug. Teens are insecure and want to fit in and be accepted. They think that taking drugs and drinking is “cool” and a lot of “fun” to do on weekends, that it helps them have a good time. We are also at an age where we are trying to be independent, we are breaking away from our parents and testing our boundaries. So being rebellious and doing things against our parents can be exciting. It is a fact that most kids were given their first alcohol or drugs by someone they trusted or admired, often a close friend or relative. Not a creepy drug dealer we were taught to be afraid of that hides behind the school. The first friend to offer me drugs was not one I would ever have expected. The doctor I met at a rehab visit explained to us that sometimes the ones closest to you can be the most toxic.

The media glorifies drug and alcohol abuse. Television, the internet and magazines constantly feature so called “celebrities” who were arrested for drugs or drunk driving. Unfortunately in our society these well known people gain more fame and popularity from it instead of being chastised. We seem to have it backwards in who our role models are, rewarding the losers and not the winners.

We need to end the Hollywood glamorization of spa type rehabs in Malibu and Beverly Hills catering to the beautiful rich and famous. We need to show addiction for what it really is, and what real everyday addicts look like, before and after. Having teens tour a downtown rehab center would be a sobering wake up for most. It certainly frightened and disgusted me when I visited a relative a few years ago in one. There were no Brad Pitts laying in the sun there. Instead I saw broken worn out people with bad skin, horrible teeth, chain smoking and drinking a lot of coffee which to me seemed to replace one addiction with another. They were either jittery or spaced out and all looked decades older than they actually were. Most would leave there and end up back within a few months time, that is if they didn't die of an overdose first.

My personal anti-drug has always been my friends doing drugs. I have seen the negative effect it has on their lives. Several of my friends who were doing great in school started out with “just” Marijuana, “it’s natural and not addicting” they professed. In a few short months they gradually increased their consumption from once in a while to every week. Soon after they graduated to alcohol, street drugs even prescription pills from their parents medicine cabinets, whatever they could find. I saw my friends’ personalities change and their grades fall. I saw them barely making it through school while being high. It is only a matter of time before they will be expelled from school. Their parents are suspicious of everything they do, and they have lost the respect of their siblings. Teens that were once their friends are afraid to be associated with them. They are oblivious to what’s going on around them, or maybe they just don’t care.

I have a great time being me and do not need chemicals inside my body to help me have a good time. I want to wake up and remember every single thing I did the day before. The trust and respect from my family and friends mean more to me than anything else in the world, and I am not willing to jeopardize all of that for the sake of alcohol or drugs. Keeping my body, mind and spirit healthy is important. I keep my body active with riding horses, golf and swimming. I keep my mind busy with books, playing guitar and talking to friends. My spirit is filled by volunteering in my neighborhood, playing guitar at Church and having a strong belief in God. My best advice and biggest weapon of all in winning the war on drugs is to never, ever underestimate the power of prayer!

The way I try to prevent other people from using drugs is by following my mantra from Gandhi “ Be the change you want to see in the world .“ Discussing with other students the negative side effects drugs can have on you. I share my families struggle and pain dealing with relatives who have lost the battle, and the long road of those that have it now under control. If I help to promote a healthy and sober life, more teens will realize the beauty of life without drugs. All we need to do is make a stand and let the ugly truth about drug use be known. I am constantly telling my friends that do not do drugs that they have so much more integrity by not giving into what is popular. Boosting their confidence giving them the strength to say no even for just a day. They say there is strength in numbers so if all anti-drug teens bond together and say NO more kids would not be embarrassed to join the cause. Making not taking drugs the “cool” choice- The future is ours.

I was honored to make Laura’s pledge online and have printed it out promising to share it’s message with my friends and family.