

The Black Hole

Drowning in a world they want to escape, they see the reasons float by--anger, pain, self-pity, peer pressure, boredom, and countless others. None of the reasons they had for getting into drugs and alcohol can help this person. There is never a reason good enough to use drugs or consume alcohol. The aftermath of drugs is painful and hard to overcome and many are consumed by the black hole drugs become. Drugs hurt not only the people who use them, but everyone near them. This suffering can be avoided; drugs can be prevented with some effort. If parents and teachers get involved and take a stand against drugs--help teens make better friend choices, provide a better understanding of the effects of drugs, and give them hope for the future, we can prevent many young people from getting started using drugs.

Teens are especially social and greatly rely on their closest friends. Even my mom, who is the most strong-willed person I know, drank beer before she was of legal age—because many of her friends did it. But my grandmother taught my mom about the effects of using hard drugs, so even if any of her friends had used hard drugs and tried to influence her, the stronger influence of my grandmother would have helped her say no. If a teen chooses a best friend or two who are into drugs or do not see a problem using drugs, the teen is more likely to do drugs. On the other hand, if someone's closest friends are strongly against drugs, that person is more likely to not use drugs. Abstinence is completely up to each individual, but with guidance and support from schools and parents, more teens will be against drugs.

Usually, a lack of understanding of something is what scares people. Horror movies are always scarier if the characters do not know what they are fighting against or how to defeat it. Unfortunately, with drugs and alcohol, it seems that the less people know about the consequences, the more likely they are to use drugs. There needs to be a better understanding of what drugs do to people, and young people could get this knowledge from a “crash course.” With their high school, teens should visit a drug and alcohol research center. At the center, they can see the effects drugs have on the brain, liver, and other essential body parts. After that, there should be a trip to a rescue house for drug addicts to see people who are in extreme suffering and hear stories of how getting clean saved people’s lives, and what life on drugs is really like. Once they see how scary drugs and alcohol are, many will be afraid of a monster that is very real. If parents and teachers get involved, teenagers may be afraid, but will know that they can stand up and say no.

Babies watch their parents, children watch their parents, and teenagers watch their parents. They watch so they can learn. They become like their parents in some way, shape, or form. If their parents do not talk to them about not doing drugs or the issues with even trying drugs, they are more likely to get addicted. Parental involvement is the biggest factor in the prevention of drug abuse. If parents say no, and explain why everyone should say no, teenagers will be able to say no to drugs more easily. There are many adolescents that have parents who are not around much, or parents who do drugs themselves, and this is where teachers can exert some influence.

Adult teachers influence their students every day. If a teacher cares about a student, the student will never forget. If a teacher who cares is strongly against drugs, the student will not forget that either. Teachers can cover for the parents who cannot or will not be involved in their child's life. A good role model is the best way to prevent drugs for teenagers.

Drugs and alcohol are strong and destructive. One try will suck people into the darkness where it is nearly impossible to free one's self. The effects of drugs and alcohol hurt so many people a year that prevention has become one of the nation's biggest wars. This is a winnable war; with good choices, understanding, and role models, the black hole can be closed almost completely.

Where Does it All Begin?

It only took my first drink and first hit until I was introduced to my addiction. I was fifteen years old, barely a sophomore in high school, when I started heavily smoking marijuana and drinking. Easily, I noticed how all of the popular kids at school were the ones boasting about their party-filled weekends and their well-worth it hangovers. I was consumed by their world; these stories captured my attention and eventually became my own. Within the first quarter of my sophomore year, I had been accepted into this new circle of friends after consenting to their destructive, but still appealing, lifestyle.

I started my journey on the “social staircase.” Instantly making friends was uplifting. I finally felt admired and was having fun. Those feelings were only temporary though. Eventually, my parents noticed a shift in my attitude and they became concerned with what I was *really* doing on the weekends. Never before had I gone behind my parent’s backs, but by now it seemed like second nature. My priorities had shifted and I was feeling less guilty about my bad choices.

Since all of my friends were participating in the same drinking, partying, smoking and lying, I couldn’t be doing anything *too* bad, right? Wrong. I believe this is the biggest influence on students today: our friends. I know I tried to fit in with these “cool” friends by acting like them. They drank, so I wanted to drink. They smoked weed, so I wanted to smoke. You can call it peer pressure or low self-esteem, but whatever it is, I feel that students today party and take drugs mainly because their friends do and it is considered

cool. What's challenging about this reality is that drinking and drugging goes on almost everywhere in high school. Partying and under-aged drinking is on TV, glamorized in movies, and is basically unavoidable in today's media. To some it may even be considered socially acceptable for these underage issues to be brushed under the rug. For these reasons, youth can easily be influenced or swayed into using drugs and alcohol because it may be considered "just the thing to do."

Quickly, my actions led me down a devastating path and I started to hurt my family and myself. Constantly, I was getting in trouble at home, but it was never enough to stop my fast lifestyle. I was no longer in control and my life with drugs and alcohol was miserable. I was always depressed or anxious about all of the problems I had created but could not resolve. I got to a point where I couldn't imagine my life with or without drugs. Getting high or drunk became my only coping mechanism; it was the only answer to my problems.

My relationship with my family was torn apart. I hated being home or around my parents because I was usually trying to cover up my many lies. My parents and I often fought through these times. My harsh language could pierce my mom's heart and I could manipulate my way through almost any argument. My addiction was a sick disease, and I lost all control. Not only was my behavior upsetting my own life and future, my parents were equally devastated to watch their daughter fade away.

My deepest bottom resulted in an attempt at suicide. My selfish scream for attention echoed for months. I had reached my pit and my parents had run out of answers. Quickly I was enrolled into a treatment-based boarding school where I spent my sixteenth birthday. Being away from home for six months shook my world. Finally, my

destruction came to an abrupt stop and I learned how to get help. I found my true identity that I had lost and finally felt true joy.

Now, where does sobriety begin? It was definitely not easy to break my habits and restructure my lifestyle after quitting my using. Where it all comes down is to a moment of clarity. A time where I personally made a promise to myself that allows me to live a life of peace, believing in a power greater than myself, and committing to living a clean and sober life. Without this, I will not survive. My addiction is a stranger to the past, but it is still alive and still can consume the joy I feel today. Today I am in control of my decisions, asking my God to relieve me of self-will. With well-earned knowledge in my pocket, I have been privileged to live a *normal* life as a senior in high school. My definition of normal used to be warped and distorted of the truth I believe in now. Today my definition of a normal life is one of lasting happiness, responsibilities and consequences, expressions of originality, and an ongoing quest for truth.

To do my part in preventing peers of mine from using drugs or alcohol, I've made it a goal to be a role model. Having fun is a big priority to young people, so I hope to provide an outlet for others to come and enjoy life in a clean way. Teenagers today need more appealing activities to do, like art, sports, music, visiting festivals, taking walks, exploring places, meeting new people. Sobriety doesn't need to be boring and I hope to be an influence toward that.

My addiction began with my first drink and ended with admitting my powerlessness. Something that can so easily be prevented can control our lives and our families. Choosing friends wisely and picking supportive people to be around are such important influences, especially for young people. Living a joyful and rewarding life is

much more simple, with less heartache. I hope to do my best in supporting my friends and making an impact on my community as well.