

Joel's Reinforcement Library

NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!

“Thank goodness it's only cigarette smoking!”

"It's only cigarette smoking, at least he is not using drugs." Many modern parents would feel a strong sense of agreement with the sentiment expressed above. But parents who feel safe and secure in this belief are overlooking some very obvious and some, not so obvious flaws in their understanding of smoking, and drug addiction in general.

In 1989, the Surgeon General's Report on the Health Consequences of Smoking concentrated on one area only, smoking as an addiction. This landmark report established two facts about smoking in respect to nicotine's addictive properties. First and foremost, nicotine is the addictive chemical reinforcing the smoking behavior, a behavior which is responsible for more deaths than all other drug addictions, including alcoholism, combined. This was a reconfirmation of a concept which many knew already. So the feeling that at least smoking is not as bad as using drugs is a twisted sense of logic. The child is actually using a very addictive drug, although it is accurate to say at least it is a drug that he won't end up in major troubles with the law over.

The second finding, though, would shatter the sense of relief felt by any parent with the idea that at least the child is not using an illegal controlled substance. Findings from various areas of the report went as follows:

Persons who use dependence-producing drugs are often cigarette smokers and cigarette smoking precedes and may be predictive of illicit drug use. The National Household Survey on Drug Abuse (1985) reported a 32 fold increase in incidence of cocaine use in 12-17 year olds who smoked cigarettes daily compared to those who never smoked. Even more impressively, there was a 113 fold increase in use of marijuana.

Kandel found that virtually all persons who ever used illicit drugs such as marijuana and cocaine had previously used licit drugs such as cigarettes

and alcohol.

"Although some use of alcohol may precede tobacco use, it is prior use of tobacco and not alcohol that emerges...as the stronger predictor of illicit drug use."

Dr. Ginzel of the University of Arkansas described the "pivotal role of tobacco as an integral part of the addictive process" and said that:

"In looking at tobacco as a gateway to the use of other addictive substances, we must not forget that smoking has caused the deaths of more people than have fallen victim to all of the other drugs and alcohol combined. The general public's continuing lack of understanding of the sheer magnitude of the toll tobacco inflicts is unfortunate, but the lack of understanding and appropriate action on the part of those who pretend to take charge of the nation's drug problem is intolerable and inexcusable."

The significance of these statements is inescapable. Giving the stamp of approval to smoking as an acceptable alternative to drug usage may very well lead to experimentation and possibly addiction to the substances the parent fears most. Strong efforts should be taken by parents and the educational community at large to prevent the early use of cigarettes in an effort to reduce the long-term health consequences of smoking as well as minimizing the risks of illegal and life threatening usage of other controlled substances. If you have children or grandchildren in schools, or if you yourself are a faculty member, please consider encouraging implementation of these smoking prevention programs for your school district.

If you have children who know you are or ever have been a smoker, you should never draw a distinction between smoking and other drugs of dependency while trying to rationalize the legitimacy of cigarette smoking over the other substances. Children will recognize and feed on the hypocrisy that it is all right for you but not for them. Rather, tell the truth about the lack of understanding and ignorance that caused you to originally experiment with smoking and led you into the grips of an addiction_an addiction you desperately wish to break and stay free from for the rest of your life. Nicotine is an addiction which will once again control you and will probably cost you your life if you give it the opportunity.

Try to develop a sense of understanding in your children of how easy it is to lose control over an addictive substance, whether it be cigarettes, alcohol,

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heroin or crack cocaine. And for your sake, as well as your children, set a positive exemplary role by remembering to - NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!

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