

Joel's Reinforcement Library

NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!

What Can We Do to Stop the Rise of Teen Smoking?

Long before I began teaching at smoking cessation clinics, I worked for the American Cancer Society. My position there involved developing and implementing smoking prevention programs geared at students in junior high, high school and college. I was kept quite busy, speaking to over 60,000 kids from 1972 through the time I started teaching clinics at the end of 1978. In this time period, smoking rates among school age children were dropping in boys and beginning to stabilize in girls. It seemed that the message of the dangers of smoking and the importance of not starting, what could very well turn into a life dependency was reaching many of the children of the time.

Unfortunately, as recent media coverage has illustrated, we are once again living in a time where the popularity and appeal of tobacco usage is rising in children. Even though we have a better understanding today of the addictive nature of nicotine, that message is either not reaching our youth or not being comprehended. The danger of not understanding nicotine addiction leads to what is viewed by many children and some adults as harmless and natural experimentation with this daring and "grown up" substance. Experimentation with nicotine should not be viewed as harmless or as a rite of passage.

Nicotine is one of the most addictive substances known to man! Over 80% of children who experiment with nicotine will go on to regular usage with many experiencing tolerance and withdrawal symptoms within months of the first cigarette. The significance of this cannot be overstated. These are indicators of addiction. Nicotine has the potential of addicting over 80% of its users. By contrast, alcohol has an addiction rate of approximately 10%. The odds are against children if they take up smoking, and, if recent

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trends continue, the odds of children, and maybe even the odds of your child taking up smoking are increasing.

While you may not be able to change the national statistics, I think any of you who either have children or grandchildren of your own, or friends or other family with children should do what you can to improve their odds of not becoming another smoking statistic.

You were once there. You understand how early experimentation can turn into an addiction. An addiction which may have caused you to personally suffer the physical ravages induced by smoking. An addiction which may have caused a difficult and painful time period when you tried to break free. An addiction you may have witnessed in friends and family members which prematurely took them away from you because of their early disability and death. You have been on both sides and know how difficult it was to get cigarettes out of your life and how hard it is to keep them out.

We need to help clarify the addictive nature of nicotine, review the overall dangers of tobacco usage, and, offer some strategies for coping with the peer pressures for tobacco usage faced by our children. If you are involved with schools or PTA groups, please raise the issue of educating our children regarding the truth about smoking and addiction.

I hope by working together we can help positively influence the future of our children. And, do not forget, your future is still being shaped on a day by day basis. To keep your future healthier and happier by having a smoke free lifestyle, remember - NEVER TAKE ANOTHER PUFF!

Joel

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