

Refuse, Remove, Reasons: Girls' Attitudes are Changing When it Comes to Drugs

On the Video...

Survey results from The Partnership At Drugfree.org report that girls appear more inclined than ever to reach for drugs and booze to help them emotionally. Some girls say drugs "help you forget your troubles." Researchers advise parents to be especially attentive to their daughters' moods and worries.

In fact, in some cases, there are more girls abusing drugs than boys. But the reason for their drug abuse may be very different, and that should make a big difference in how parents handle the problem. Boys say they use drugs to get a thrill, like 18-year-old Joshua. "It was boring unless I was high. Cause I just didn't feel right. I was just like – I felt normal, and normal wasn't cool, it was just boring."

But girls say they use drugs for very different reasons. Cheri, age 17, explains, "I think for females, it's just kinda just to fit in...They have low self esteem, or their family life's not doing good, or someone's been raped...I think it runs a lot deeper than it does with males."

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, what once was primarily a male problem has changed. And new research confirms that girls are more likely than ever to reach for drugs and alcohol. The reason, experts say, is that many girls use drugs to deal with stress and anxiety.

"We used to believe that boys were more likely to use than girls and that there were more boys out there using than girls, and what this study has shown is that the numbers are the same now," explains addiction counselor Heather Hayes. "And with that kind of stress, a lot of what the research has shown is that chronic stress tends to break the dopamine receptors in the brain, setting the person up to be addicted. So, you've got the stress there and you pour the chemicals on top and it's an absolute formula for an addict."

Experts say if your daughter is stressed out, parents should try to keep the lines of communication open – and help her find productive ways to cope: keeping a journal, exercise, even therapy. And realize that there may be more going on than just a bad crowd.

"I think it's real easy for parents to say, too, that it is merely because of who my daughters associate with that they're involved with drugs or alcohol," says Armando Corpus, a drug treatment program director, "but really it's a much more basic problem than that. It's about who my daughter is, and what she's dealing with."

What We Need to Know...

According to the 2009 Partnership Attitude Tracking Study from The Partnership At Drugfree.org, teen girls are more likely to associate "self-medicating" benefits with drinking and getting high. More than two-thirds of teen girls responded positively to the question "using drugs helps kids deal with problems at home" (an 11 percent increase, up from 61 percent in 2008 to 68 percent in 2009) and more than half reported that drugs help teens forget their troubles (a 10 percent increase, up from 48 percent in 2008 to 53 percent in 2009).

Stress has been identified as a key factor leading to drinking, smoking and drug use among girls and more than three times as many young girls as boys reported having symptoms of depression in 2008.

Conversation Starters...

- What causes you stress and anxiety?
- How would you define your strategies to cope with those factors?
- What helps you relax? Are those healthy choices?