

Refuse, Remove, Reasons: Teen Drug Abuse Has Long-Lasting Consequences

On the Video...

New brain and science research presented recently at Neuroscience 2010 confirms again the dangers and potential impacts of drug use on brain chemistry well into adulthood. The National Institutes of Health also examined the effects of alcohol on the teenage brain.

"And one important difference we found between these two groups of kids was that the kids with the heavy drinking patterns were not able to retain as much information as the kids who were non-drinkers," explains Dr. Susan Tapert, a clinical psychologist. "The subject on the left is a normal, healthy 15-year-old boy, and the subject on the right is a 15-year-old boy who is actually a very heavy drinker. You can see that this is a really important area of the brain for remembering locations of things, and over here – nothing."

According to the Society for Neuroscience, more than 4,300 teens in the United States try an illicit drug for the first time each day. And for too many teens, the drug of choice is prescription drugs or alcohol, found right at home.

"This is the age of medication. I think there's tremendous amount of all sorts of medicine out there that are readily available in the bathrooms, in the cabinets at home," says Dr. Steven Jaffe, an adolescent psychiatrist.

In fact some teens like Joseph and T.J. say the medicine cabinets are the first place kids look.

"That's the first place," says Joseph.

"That's mostly how it starts," says T.J.

Researchers urge parents to understand the effect of drugs and alcohol on brain development during the teen years, to control accessibility and be on the lookout for any signs of trouble.

"Grades going down, skipping school, not involved in activities that you used to be involved in, change in peer group, change in dress, more isolation," says Dr. Robert Margolis, with the Solutions Outpatient Program.

What We Need to Know...

Most teens don't start using drugs expecting to develop a substance abuse problem. While most teens probably see their drug use as a casual way to have fun, the consequence to casual drug use can be that it develops into a true addiction. Very few addicts recognize when they have crossed the line from casual use to addiction.

When teens become addicted they lose friends, develop health problems, start to fail in school, experience memory loss, lose motivation, and alienate their family and friends with their negative behaviors and often unpredictable emotional swings.

Conversation Starters...

- Have you seen the effects of drugs on your friends? What have you noticed?
- The choices we make can really have a big impact on our lives. What choices are you making that can really make a positive... or negative impact?
- What's really important to you? What would you sacrifice by trying drugs?