

Your Child's Perspective

WHY A CHILD USES DRUGS

Understandably, some parents of drug users think that their child might have been pressured into taking drugs by peers or drug dealers. But children say they choose to use drugs because they want to:

- relieve boredom
- feel good
- forget their troubles and relax
- have fun
- satisfy their curiosity
- take risks
- ease their pain
- feel grown-up
- show their independence
- belong to a specific group
- look cool.

Rather than being influenced by new friends whose habits they adopt, children and teens often switch peer groups so they can hang around with others who have made the same lifestyle choices.

Parents know their children best and are therefore in the best position to suggest healthy alternatives to doing drugs. Sports, clubs, music lessons, community service projects, and after-school activities not only keep children and teens active and interested, but also bring them closer to parents who can attend games and performances. To develop a positive sense of independence, you could encourage babysitting or tutoring. For a taste of risk-taking, suggest rock-climbing, karate, or camping.

WHAT OUR CULTURE TELLS CHILDREN ABOUT DRUGS

Unfortunately, the fashions and fads that thrive in our culture are sometimes the ones with the most shock value. Children today are surrounded by subtle and overt messages telling them what is “good” about alcohol, tobacco, and drugs. Your children may see TV characters living in wealth and splendor off drug money, may stumble onto

a website urging legalization of marijuana, may see their favorite movie stars smoking in their latest films, or may hear songs describing the thrill of making love while high.

To combat these impressions, sit down with them when they watch TV. Explore the Internet with them to get a feel for what they like. Anything disturbing can be turned into a “teachable moment.” You may want to set guidelines for which TV shows, films, and websites are appropriate for your child. (You also may want to reassure children that the world is not as bleak as it appears in the news, which focuses heavily on society’s problems.)