

Substance Use and Abuse Parent Interview

Interviewee: Dad (doctor: talks to lots of people, many with drug problems)

1. What is your definition of peer pressure?

Dad defined peer pressure as “when friends or family or coworkers said or felt that you should [do something] — sometimes it’s nonverbal, sometimes it’s behavioral.” I thought this was a valid and simple definition. When I asked him whether it is always negative, he said that it “could be neutral, or negative or positive — for example, it could be get you to achieve good goals.” In his opinion, it includes any advice from friends “with an intention to change you.” In other words, anything meant to persuade can be considered a form of peer pressure, but it is not *all* negative or *all* positive. It really depends on what it is.

2. Does the media influence underage drinking?

“Yes. It legitimizes it, because they often see attractive, famous people who drink, and they want to identify themselves with those successful people, which makes them more susceptible to drink.” When I asked about the wellness program and how science and general education is improving, “This only happens in a protected environment, like Easton. Especially in the inner city, there’s a lot of smoking and drinking involved.” Dad lived in the Bronx for many years, so I guess he would know. I also strongly agree with him that our education is advanced and our small bubble of friends and people we know in Easton and Redding is very isolated and “protected.” And then, when I asked about the anti-drug advertisements, the opposite of this negative media, he said, “Yes, [they are getting more effective], because they’re getting smarter ... No, not more science; they’re more geared towards psychology. They use the snowball effect when using drugs or car accidents. They used to show the [medical] effects of the drugs, but now they aren’t. Now they’re showing people struggling with what really matters to them. That has a much greater impact than before — it’s not as much a scare tactic, but goes more to the core: people don’t really care about themselves, but about the people they love.” I just thought this was a great description of how the new advertisements try to help people — they appeal to emotions and what people really care about. This is especially important in societies like ours where there

are many affluent families with easy access to drugs, no drive to work hard to survive (parents already have money), and where people have the freedom to experiment for no reason.

3. Is marijuana a “gateway” drug?

“Yes, but it’s not the only one. Some people feel that alcohol is a gateway drug. Some people feel that cigarette smoking is too.” I asked him whether or not he agreed with the statistics that show that many people who use multiple or stronger drugs originated from marijuana, he said, “I can’t argue with the statistics, but they’re probably flawed. It’s based only on the people who are willing to report and risk themselves. It actually may be a higher number.” But he concluded with, “My feeling is that starting with one drug, and getting away with it, feeling that you’re not harmed, often times emboldens the individual and will make them try something more. But only if it didn’t give them the high they wanted and if they are susceptible to addiction.” This is a logical argument. The second statement that people will turn to other drugs “if it didn’t give them the high they wanted” is especially true of marijuana.

4. What is the best approach to talking to young people about substance abuse?

“A balanced education. Not to use excessive scare tactics. Not to use unnecessary authority. But to be fair. And not to vilify everyone who uses drugs; instead, understand the statistics — they are powerful. But it is also important to legitimize [some drug use], because it may not always be your fault: you may have an addiction personality, and need to seek help. Generally, education will help, but there are a lot of psychiatric diseases that it won’t help.” He went on to explain in which cases it might help, and the few exceptions: “Education will affect a lot of people, but reality will affect everything. For example, if your whole family dies— there is no meaning to life anymore. No matter how educated you are, you’re going to feel like you want to kill yourself, you’ll want to find an escape from life. But this is really why you should understand and help them: they’re not all bad people.” This put the idea of drug use in new light to me. We’ve heard of an “escape from life” and depression as causes of drug use, but we had only focused on the stresses of school and a possible escape from a bad mistake. But I hadn’t realized that it could this terrible feeling of depression that might lead to drug use might come from something like a death or something else you can’t control. It’s true: they’re not all “bad people.”