

## CHAPTER 4

# Parent's Responsibility

Having a child is the greatest gift but, also, the greatest responsibility you will ever shoulder. The love you have for your child, your incredible sense of protection towards him and your desire for the child to experience all things good, are just a part of the wonderful experience of being a parent. I am sure you are more than aware of these facts.

You are probably also more than aware by now that your responsibilities and duty of care towards your child simply does not stop; there is no timetable. The amount of responsibilities you have, as a parent may also seem endless, yet all are vitally important when considering the impact your efforts make in your child's life.

Your concern for the welfare of your child and your hope to continue a relationship or to build an ongoing relationship with him are probably the reasons for reading this guide. This effort will help. It is your responsibility to get educated on drug issues.

Even though this guide can't claim to make you an expert on the subject, it will help you become more resourceful as you strive to be the best parent you can be. Parents want to be perfect when it comes to raising their children; however, it's impossible to be perfect. No parent is.

I have heard this comment so often from my own mother and from countless other sources: *"If only I knew then, what I know now!"*

Yes, this seems to be a common realization for older parents or grandparents, and rightly so. Of course, parents wish to avoid regrets but because parenting is such a unique *learn as you go* situation, mistakes and regrets are often inevitable. It is simple — experience produces wisdom — and so, we all try our best while we *experience* the parenting phenomenon.

In wanting the very best for their children, a prime concern for the majority of parents is how they are best able to keep their children drug-free. It is obvious that not every responsibility of being a parent, if fulfilled, can ensure this to be the case so, I have endeavored, throughout this **Parent's Discussion Section**, to focus mainly on the areas of parenting I believe are most important, most relative, to this subject of drug prevention. In addition, keeping in mind that you did want to finish reading this book this century, when discussing these parenting issues I have had to be concise, while still ensuring a comprehensive discussion of all areas that need to be addressed.

**I believe drug education is an integral part of every parent's responsibility, and I feel parents who take this step, reduce the potential for unintentional mistakes. As even the best of parents are not naturally equipped for drug prevention strategies.**

It is all very well, trying to research information on drug and alcohol abuse, once you are aware your child may have a problem with these substances, but why wait? Through reading the information in this guide, you will become prepared and assisted to formulate your best approaches to any potential situations before they arise.

Drug and alcohol issues are becoming an accepted part of society but, for some parents, these issues may seem distant, far removed from their own life and family. Many parents' ignorance and denial leads them to believe that *this will never happen to my child*. The fact remains, a parent will never really know, and can never presume to rule out, any possibilities that might play a threatening part in the child's life and welfare.

**Some parents unwisely promote prejudice by saying, "We don't use drugs because we are not like that." *Like what?***

An adult is capable of incorporating so many factors when developing a perspective on a certain thing, person, or situation. When looking at the reasons why a person resorts to drug use, unfortunately, some parents have limited sources of information from which to derive their opinions. Sometimes, parents only have cliché comments or stereotypical judgments of drug users; therefore, they arrive at a biased perspective or prejudiced opinion of drug users.

**It would be a better idea if every parent became as informed as possible to the *real causes* of why some people use drugs, so they don't inadvertently omit any possibilities or causes as to why their own child may turn to drug use.**

If all parents were correctly informed of all the possible reasons children may use drugs they would also, in turn, be in a better position to impart this information to their children. Children will then be able to use this information when they face these challenging choices.

Being well informed on this subject is your responsibility, and the knowledge will help you be better prepared for the challenges, uncertainties and questions regarding drug and alcohol issues that face your child every day. You will also be better equipped to monitor your child physically, emotionally and behaviorally for any signs of change you know are indicative of drug use or potential drug use. If, by your intuition or your skills of observation, you notice anything that concerns you about your child, talk to him because your communication skills will be the best chance you have to stay in touch with your child's world.

Parents should not minimize their own behavior. Reasons why children use drugs are often similar to why adults use drugs, and if parents are trying to understand how to help prevent their child from using drugs, this is important. Understanding your own behavior will also help you in your communication with your child.

New South Wales Health [NSW Health], The Centre for Education for Information on Drugs and Alcohol [CEIDA] (1996-2001) suggests parents ask themselves a few questions on their attitudes towards drug use. Try to think about the reasons why you have particular views concerning drug and alcohol use by kids, and from where do you get your opinions? Have you ever experienced using drugs or alcohol yourself? If so, what are your associations to these substances (Adapted with permission from NSW Health, "Parents talking" section)?

As suggested by NSW Health (CEIDA), take a close look at your opinions on adolescent drug and alcohol use. How would you explain them to your child? Are your opinions healthy and informed? Perhaps your child sees you drinking alcohol, smoking or using other drugs. Be prepared for them to ask you about this, they may ask you to explain your rational as to why they can't also participate in using these substances.

Prepare yourself. Decide what your opinions are. Then, have your responses and your educated reasons ready, so you can tell your child why you feel as you do, regarding children using drugs or alcohol. Be ready *before* your child comes to you with questions, or before you initiate a discussion about the subject. Your child will have a lot of questions to ask you and will want to know your reasoning behind your answers.

Parents should also have an honest look at how actively and emotionally involved they are in their child's life. Do you really know your child, as well as you think you do?

This comment is not meant to encourage suspicion or to erode existing trust. It is meant to remind you that the level of involvement you have in your child's life will definitely help you to remain close. It is so important to know your child on a personal level, so you are more aware of things like who they look up to, what are their dreams, who is their inspiration, what is important to them and who is important to them? This helps you understand what really makes your child tick, so you know him better as an individual.

While reading this book, you may see similarities between what is outlined in this guide and current concerns you may have regarding your child physically, emotionally or behaviorally. If this is the case: *remember, it's very important that you don't ever jump to conclusions or presume the worst.* If your child displays any apparent problems; i.e., bad behavior, rebelliousness, secretiveness, it may be just what it appears to be, and these apparent problems may have no lasting ramifications or potentials for drug use. This is not saying you should ignore what you are noticing but, in fact, not every problem you have with your child will necessarily mean he's experimenting with drugs or alcohol, or even likely to do so. However, keep your eyes open!

Remember, all teenagers go through different stages — different behavior, creative clothing and choice of music — but these teenage phases usually don't last for long. They just keep on changing! Any negative changes you may notice in your child's physical appearance, behavior or attitude, which seems to be lasting for a long time and continually worsening in nature, are probably more indicative of real problems your child may be experiencing, rather than just a teenage phase. Yes, children do have the power to put their parents through the wringer; however, never give up and, always, always, remind them you love them, especially when they are least lovable.

I believe it is a parents' responsibility to express *Unconditional Love* toward their children, presuming this is what parents feel.

Displaying unconditional love means that, although a child continues to need discipline and boundaries, he is still very aware of your love and that this love does not fluctuate according to his acts. This knowledge instills in your child a security that, even though he may screw up sometimes, you still love him and want him. When this type of love is displayed, it will help your child avoid developing any possible rejection issues from within your relationship with them.

Now, a good deal of the information outlined in this guide you may already know and, while reading, you may think, I already know all of this. However, the question to ask yourself is: Do I practice it? It never hurts to be reminded of what we think we already know.

Lastly, I encourage you to enjoy your Parenting responsibilities. They are a gift, just as every child is a gift.

## CHAPTER 10

# How Does Your Child Really Feel?

For some parents, recalling what it is like being a teenager is easier than for others; yet, in order to relate to how your child feels during this time of her life, what she thinks, what stresses she has, and what is important to her, it is important to remember. In addition, times have changed. Even though there may be similarities, there are also different challenges today for teenagers to face, than what you faced when you were that age.

The following points are from my own understanding and from my research into the challenges teenagers face (New South Wales Health [NSW Health], CEIDA, 1996-2001):

- There are the physical changes that occur. Most teenagers are very self-conscious and aware of these changes and they can be very stressed by them.
- They can feel watched, judged and extremely self-conscious.
- Teenagers place great importance on feeling like they belong and are accepted by their peer group.
- They can feel embarrassed, clumsy and uncomfortable.
- Teenagers want to experience independence in many new areas, some more than others; yet, while some use safe discretion in making decisions, others are willing to take greater risks.
- They can feel alienated, misunderstood and insignificant.
- They can be bullied by other teenagers
- They sometimes mature physically faster than they mature emotionally, which can affect their judgment and decision making ability.
- They are easily influenced and usually have limited experience with individuality and exercising personal choice

- They continually have new ground in front of them to experience.
- They usually don't have much experience in rejection.
- They think they know it all, and feel wise enough to make their own decisions and that they know all the ramifications of their actions.
- They are impatient, and have a need for instant gratification of their wants.
- Teenagers usually feel the most comfortable when they're around other teenagers. This is when they feel accepted by their peers, who are experiencing the same issues (Adapted with permission from NSW Health, "Parents talking" section).

Of course, every parent has once been a teenager, but through the previous points shared from NSW Health (CEIDA) and myself, I have tried to spell it out. *Being a teenager is fraught with hurdles, tests and trials.*

*Please note: As a child's involvement with drugs increases, as mine did, so too will her desire to associate with other children who use drugs.*

I preferred to spend what spare time I could with other drug users as I knew they would not condemn my behavior or judge me and I could stay in this environment until the effects of the drugs wore off. The activities of my non-drug using friend's or family did not seem as welcoming to me anymore because I knew I could not get away with being out of it while in their company. Obviously, the way I related to my family during this time also changed.

It is not abnormal or unusual for parents who have always felt they've had a close relationship with their child, to somehow feel this relationship change as their child enters the teenage years.

Yes, it is normal enough to notice changes, just try to ensure that these changes aren't negative ones, and that they don't lead to distancing between the two of you. Parents are responsible to never be complacent about negative side effects the teenage years may bring. Keep closely involved in your child's life and always make time to talk to them one on one, giving them your full attention. If you find yourself distanced from your teenager, besides all the advice on communication skills, etc, maybe just try doing something radical to dissolve the distance.

For example, maybe one night when you hear your child's loud music blaring from their bedroom, instead of reacting as you normally would, you could do something they would not expect. You could forget all your everyday worries for a while like the bills, the housework, and tomorrow's deadlines and instead of telling your teenagers to "turn that music down," for a change, go into their bedroom and start

dancing and get them to join in. They'll either tell you to get out, or really enjoy your company. They might even just burst out laughing at you, but it will be a change, something funny that they would never have expected. After that, if they have not thrown you out of their room, maybe you could take the opportunity to stay there and have a chat. Ask them how they are doing?

On occasion, I remember my mother used to come out for the night with my older sister and me, at our request. We would take her dancing, or we would do something in town. I remember loving it when we would get her dressed up in what we considered trendy clothes. Contrary to what people would imagine, on these occasions I did not feel weird having Mum with us. I thought it was fun. I loved feeling like we were more like three sisters going out together, and not just "Mum and her two daughters." I am not sure how much Mum liked the trendy clothes we made her wear, but I do know she enjoyed bonding with us in a different way, feeling like she was part of our world, as she was.

Whatever method you choose to get through that invisible barrier you may be experiencing with your child, keep trying until something works to dissolve it. Distance left unchecked in any relationship, just creates more distance.

If you are the parent of a teenager, remember, teenagers are curious, experimental, vulnerable and sensitive because they are at a constantly changing time of life. Your child may make all the transitions through this stage of their life with a healthy reality, self-esteem and sense of self worth, or they may not. They may face challenges that prove difficult for them to cope with and that will really require you to be there for them.

Be aware of significant times of change in your child's life, anything, from starting school, moving up different levels of schooling (especially when they enter high school), moving to a different area, changing schools, even bullying or alienation from peers.

Changes in your child's environment can be very stressful and, depending on your child's coping abilities and self-esteem, these changes may instigate or contribute to emotional problems developing in your child. In addition, although these changes may not directly cause potential drug use, they might contribute to it by introducing new influencing factors into your child's life.

In my high school years, I changed schools three times, with the last two times being extremely traumatic. I did not make friends very easily and by the last school, I did not even bother. I was sad and thoroughly sick of trying to fit in with the

crowd. During each transition, my self-esteem dropped even further and I was not coping. My parents thought I was just going through normal hiccoughs of transition. However, during this time, my emotional problems not only increased but I was also introduced to drugs. Because I never talked about my problems or my drug use with my parents, I grew very distanced from them and started to seclude myself into my own disturbed world. I always pretended I was much happier than I really was, so it was very hard for my parents to know what my real feelings were. I suppose I was also very good at hiding any signs of my drug use.

If you have moved to a new area, or your child has changed schools and has not been able to make any new friends, this can be extremely traumatic. Try having your child join an outside youth club or sports group where their chances of making new friends is increased. Remember peer acceptance is very important to children. They have a need to feel they belong.

Parents can use times of significant change, to pay special attention to their children's welfare and state of mind, as sometimes children do not make transitions to new situations or environments as well as parents anticipate they will. Parents also need to be particularly observant during these times, in relation to new influencing factors that may be introduced into their children's lives.

Try to get to know your child's friends and even their parents if possible, so you are aware of their values and attitudes. Try to be involved in activities with your child, and if you have more than one child, try to spend quality time with each of them individually.

When I was young, my parents used to take my sisters and I individually on a Mummy-daughter or Daddy-daughter date once every month or so, where we could choose the outing. I used to really look forward to these dates as I could spend time with either Mum or Dad on my own. I felt special and important.

Spending individual, quality time with your child is so important. Besides affecting a closer relationship between the two of you, your child will feel that she at least has a few stable factors in her changing world; that being your interest in her as an individual, your love of her, and her importance to you.

Find out what your child holds as special in her life so you're aware of what is important to her. Parents sometimes have a tendency to minimize the importance of certain situations or events that their children may be dealing with or be involved in. Try not to underestimate what could be very important to your child. Parents can also find it hard to believe that a child's world can be that compli-

cated. What could be interpreted as unfortunate by parents can sometimes be devastating for children.

I remember a girlfriend at school was dropped by the love of her life, so she ran away from home and overdosed on a bottle of her mother's sleeping pills. Her parents never expected such a drastic reaction from what they thought was just a teenage crush. For me, ballet dancing was my life and yet, when at the age of fifteen, I was forced to give it up due to physical reasons, I sunk into a deep depression. Instead of getting on with my life, like my parents thought I was, I started the practice of slashing my wrists in an attempt to relieve my emotional pain.

Another friend of mine from ballet school started to get lower grades at school. Even though his grades were still very high, he was a perfectionist so he thought he was failing. He started to mix alcohol with travel sickness tablets to get high, in an attempt to forget about how useless he felt. One day he overdosed on those travel sickness pills and collapsed in a bank. He never talked to his parents about his problems as he presumed they would see him as being a failure.

Granted the actions of children can be considered somewhat melodramatic at times, but what they are feeling and experiencing is real in their world. Their distortions of reality, their inability to cope with loss or change and their lack of self worth can sometimes produce dangerous effects.

Whether you are experiencing an invisible barrier in your communication with your child, or whether your child has experienced a traumatic significant time of change or loss, communication between the two of you during this period is vital. It may be up to you to determine and be observant for signs in your child that she is being negatively affected by certain events like these, especially if she does not openly discuss her feelings; therefore, you may need to initiate conversations with her. Help her open up to you through your love, care and interest in her world.

People sometimes wonder why a child will suddenly blow up and act completely out of character. Her outburst may be internal or external. Sometimes these occurrences are completely unexpected, the build up having been unnoticed. Sometimes the effects are self-destructive. Sometimes they affect others dramatically. I believe there are some important reasons behind how children get to this end stage of explosion or implosion.

If a child experiences trauma through change or loss, this may create emotional or psychological issues that can cause a child to become very emotionally needy. If a child's emotional neediness is not addressed and too long a period passes, instead of continuing with feeling needy, through the self-preservation

mode, she is likely to enclose herself within a tough wall. When this happens, her emotional neediness may warp into emotional hardness because she has experienced pain for too long, which has not been attended to by her parents or caregivers.

This is also a time of change, where instead of perhaps craving to communicate her feelings, a child will shut off any attempts at communication, further concreting the tough wall she has built around herself. She may become defiant, rebellious or even violent. She may stubbornly pursue self-destructive patterns of behavior, making communication with her almost impossible.

Parents need to be extremely conscientious in trying to fulfill their child's needs especially through periods of traumatic change or loss, where their child may be experiencing great emotional neediness. If they don't communicate on a close and personal level with their child during this time, taking great measures to love her and reassure her of her worth, a parent may miss out on the one vital period during which they'll be able to connect with their child. If this opportunity is missed, the situation may not be reversible for a long time, if ever, and may even end tragically. Avoidance of this situation will depend on the quick instinct and actions of the parent.

Previously in this chapter, I described how I went through traumatic transitions in my high schools years. During this time, I was extremely emotionally needy although I could not recognize this for myself at the time. Because I was so good at pretending that all was okay when, in fact, it was not, my parents missed the opportunity of attending to my emotional neediness. I remember feeling very vulnerable and sensitive through the beginning of this period when I was fifteen-years old. I also remember feeling very destructive towards the end of this period. I was not conscious of when this change took place inside of me but, by the time, I was seventeen-years old, I had definitely changed. Something inside me had hardened. Instead of feeling vulnerable, sad and lost, I felt self-destructive, determined and defiant. My thoughts changed. My reactions changed. My relationship with my parents changed.

I was usually a respectful daughter and, although I was not perfect, I never dared answer my mother back, let alone yell at her. Then one day, I snapped. I had a huge fight with my mother at her work. She ordered me to stay in the shop so I yelled at her and stormed out, directly against her wishes. I went straight to the train station and caught a train into the city. She rang the police, as she was worried. They picked me up and strip-searched me in the city watch house (jail), for drugs, I suppose, but all they found was my mother's bottle of sleeping pills. I told them they were acne pills for my pimples. I was then taken to my sister's house in town. My father and aunt met me there to take me home. I felt like they were cornering me, instead of trying to help, so I went to the bathroom and locked myself in. There I swallowed

the whole bottle of sleeping pills. I remember thinking, “I just don’t care whether I am here anymore.”

Although I got to the explosion/implosion stage, there was a build up to this. My way to explode/implode was to become self destructive, aiming to hurt myself, rather than anyone else. After this event, my reality changed. I continued defiantly to pursue various ways of being self-destructive, including the use of drugs.

I have an excerpt from a letter my mother wrote to me about her recollections of this time. I must express to you again my difficulty in sharing parts of my past, as I know how much my mother loved me and tried her best. Unfortunately, she was always under so much constant pressure that events occurred which she inevitably regretted.

*“You were very depressed because you were no longer at the college,” she wrote. When we moved to Glen Waverly, you and (name withheld) were up to no good, very secretive and I guess it was drugs. Then John was going on his mission. (My boyfriend and first love, left for two years to America.) Your emotions were in turmoil and you went on that long walk or hitch-hiked to our land in “the Patch” where you set up a little tent. After John left, you did not cry – just stayed in the outside flat and struggled with far too high a level of math that Daddy had chosen for you at school.*

*Oh, Crystal, I am so, so sad that when you needed me, and I knew that you did, but I was trying to build up the income of the florist shop to pay our way and save our home and, oh, Darling, I neglected you. You were going down your own defiant and self-destructive path and any of my efforts were too aggressive for you to respond to.*

*I don’t know that any of these recollections are good for either of us but, you did ask me, and now, I do listen and do try to respond. I loved you through all those times. I was just helpless because the load I was carrying was too heavy and so I didn’t do anything well, just survived, sort of. xoxoxoxoxoxo”*

I would like to tell my Mum: ***I love you, and it is all right now, Mummy.*** Circumstances were such, but now I understand how difficult life was for you at that time. Your pressures were enormous, and it was just unfortunate that our individual pressures and needs were not both better attended to. They seemed to clash at the wrong time.

I would like to tell other parents that it is sometimes impossible to avoid some situations. What advice I have outlined previously, are examples of the optimum ways in which a parent can try to avoid problems from occurring; however, you can only try your best to address what is needed in your child’s world. Sometimes, the optimum methods of parenting are unattainable all of the time.

Nevertheless, I hope you can absorb the following message from my example.

The more emotionally and actively involved you are in your child's world, and the more communicative you are with her, the better your chances of not only keeping her safe, but at staying in touch with how she is feeling, what pressures she is under, and what is important to her.

This awareness will help you better understand how you will be able to, and need to, help fulfill your child's emotional needs so she never reaches the stage where she cannot cope and dramatic changes occur.

*Remember, all you can possibly do is try your best.*

## CHAPTER 21

### Problems Drug Use Can Cause

Children who use drugs and alcohol are susceptible to harmful side effects, not just directly from the physical side effects of using drugs but also, from the situations they may find themselves in because they are under the influence.

The Victorian Department of Human Services [DHS], Public Health (2000) explains why some children have a decreased perception of risk:

Students in all year levels had very similar views regarding the risk associated with the use of most substances. Year 7 students were more likely not to know the risk associated with the use of substances. Substance use clearly decreases the perception of risk. In particular, increasing frequency of use was clearly related to a decreasing perception of the danger in the use of illicit substances. (p. 59)

Following on from the comments by the Victorian DHS, **children who are ignorant to the side effects some drugs produce, might unwittingly allow themselves to become involved in dangerous situations where they can become victims of violence or abuse.**

Children may also be naive that a person's reaction time and coordination can be altered while affected from the use of any drug, not just alcohol, and may place themselves or others in unintentional danger. Children may be seriously hurt from either driving while under the influence or from being a passenger in the car of a driver who is under the influence. Usually, the state of mind and environment a person is in contributes to the ways in which drugs or alcohol may affect him. Furthermore, side effects of some particular drugs like crack cocaine and anabolic steroids are known to produce specific effects. They can, in their own right, induce violent behavior in a person not known to normally be violent.

Some children while under the influence from the effects of using drugs or alco-



After the month passed I was finally rushed to hospital, where the doctors who diagnosed me told my parents that I might not live through the rest of the week as the infection was so far progressed throughout my heart and body. I had developed *Sub-Acute Bacterial Endocarditis, pleurisy, pneumonia, septicemia, infected liver, kidney, spleen*, and was completely unable to move any part of my body. I was extremely lucky, however, to pull through, after spending two agonizing months in the hospital. I had to learn how to walk again, due to the paralysis effect of my condition. I left the hospital with the aid of a cane, just in time for my twenty-first birthday.

All of this pain and suffering from one self infected drug injection!

**Parents, be aware, and inform your child that, besides the fact that drugs are dangerous, complications from injecting them can cause serious health risks that can be life threatening. Even fatal!**

While being under the influence of drugs or alcohol, a person might participate in risky behavior, like unprotected sexual intercourse, instead of using adequate protection like they would normally use if his sense of perspective and responsibility to himself and others was not impaired because of drug use. Unprotected sexual intercourse greatly increases the risks of contracting all sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS.

Children who are not sexually active can be influenced to participate in sexual activities when using drugs. Female children, who are not sexually active, can be too drugged to defend themselves from males, who want to take advantage of the situation and abuse them sexually, or worse.

Drugs that are known for date rape, like *GHB, Robyphenol®* or its equivalents *Flunitrazepam (Hypnodorm®)* and *Clonazepam (Klonopin®, Rivotril®)*, are slipped into the drinks of unsuspecting females, for this purpose. Explanations of how these particular drugs work and how you can help your child avoid being a victim of this crime, are found in **Chapter 25: Descriptions Of Commonly Abused Drugs** under depressants and hallucinogens.

**Drug use also has the potential to create psychological problems for the user.**

As a child's drug use and his affiliation with drug culture increases, relationships with family and friends can deteriorate subtly or quite dramatically, causing damage to the feelings and emotions of all concerned.

Immediate drug effects are obvious; however, the side effects of taking any drug could affect a child's overall sense of reality, his state of mind and self-esteem that may linger far past the point at which the drug was taken in the first place. With

continued use, a user's coping skills can deteriorate. His perception of himself can be chemically altered, creating different ranges of emotions, from guilt to bravado to paranoia. He could even develop an, *I don't care about anything* attitude.

Problems at school may develop where a child's performance deteriorates, his school associations deteriorate and even his attendance will drop. Discarding his previous morals could occur, as well as, the development of dangerous attitudes, such as reckless abandonment of his health and safety. Depression, feelings of failure, lack of self worth, even suicidal tendencies, can also develop as an after math of the chemical alteration drugs can induce in any user, especially a child.