

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: Tell me about inhalants.

ANSWER: The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) has been monitoring inhalant use among 8th graders since 1991. The good news is that inhalant use is dropping but still high. The bad news is that the Denver Metro area is ranked as one of the highest areas for inhalant use. NIDA found that in 2000, 17.9 % of 8th graders said they had used an inhalant. Jr. High continues to be the time of the greatest inhalant use. Parents, take note!

Inhalants are chemical vapors that produce psychoactive (mind-altering) effects. Jr. High young people are attracted to inhalants because they are often readily available and inexpensive. **One of the attractions of inhalants is that adults rarely question young people about them. Inhalant use starts young!**

Inhalants can be classified into three categories: (1) Solvents such as paint thinners, degreasers, gasoline, glues **correction fluids, felt-tip markers** etc. (2) Gases such as butane, propane, **whipping cream aerosols**, refrigerant gases, **spray paints, hair sprays**, ether, chloroform, nitrous oxide etc. (3) Nitrates. (4) **Medication dispensed in inhalers and subsequently abused.** Inhalants have an effect similar to anesthetics, which act to slow down the body's functions. They cause an intoxicating effect that may last for a few minutes up to a few hours. Initially, the user might feel stimulated. With repeated use, the user might lose consciousness and even experience heart failure and death. Other deleterious effects include: hearing loss, neuropathies (spasms), brain damage, bone marrow damage, liver and kidney damage, and blood oxygen depletion. (Contact the NIDA for more information.)

What can parents do?

1. Educate yourself about inhalants, prevention and the signs of abuse. Don't be naïve about evil. In some form, evil will find all of us..... and our children.
2. Talk to your kids about inhalants at an early age. Make certain your child's school includes inhalant use in their substance abuse program. Teach them skills to resist temptation. Equip them to be "wise as serpents and innocent as doves (MT 10).
3. Avoid buying products that can be easily used as inhalants (Many water-based products are available). Keep such products locked up, and be aware of how much of a particular item is being used.
4. Go with your gut. If you suspect something is wrong, talk with your child and get help. Don't tolerate any use. Watch for secretive behaviors, suspicious coughs, the smell of inhalants on clothing and skin, redness around the mouth and nose. Check out the family trash for bags that smell like inhalants that are used to concentrate the fumes.
5. Provide a family environment where you can talk and pray about anything. Provide healthy alternatives and involve yourself in your child's activities.

This is spiritual war, just as much as it is war against society and adolescent experimentation and recklessness.

Jack Lipski, M.A.
SOTHCS Counselor
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