



Drugs - A parent's journey ...

Article 1

The Road to Nowhere

November 2008 started much like any other; a normal functioning, happy household..... blissfully unaware of what was to come. It's actually quite amazing how a mother's sixth sense kicks in. Mom had brought to my attention the fact that our daughter had not been herself of late; distant, quiet, unpredictable, unaffectionate and confrontational. Her cats were normally like children to her and they didn't even get a second glance. Weight loss, tiredness and a lack of motivation for going to work was becoming more evident. However, everyone in the family shifted these signs to the back of their minds, thinking that this may be symptoms of mild depression, for which she was being treated at the time.

In late November, Mom found a very strange message on her own cell phone that was sent at 03h00 in the morning and certainly not by her; it read 'Will get together later and light up a lolly for us'. This is when the alarm bells started ringing. On confronting my daughter regarding this message, she casually admitted to dabbling in the use of crystal meth with her friends and promised solemnly that she would not do it again. The lies and deceit had just begun...

As a precautionary measure, we made an appointment with the psychiatrist that she was seeing for depression. He read her the riot act and threatened her with rehab and once again, the promises of abstinence were forthcoming. She even agreed to regular testing, so off we went to buy drug-testing kits from the pharmacy.

Suffice to say that for the next few weeks, very few test results were negative, but the explanations that were put forward were valid enough at the time to give her the benefit of the doubt. Here are some of the favourites;

'I went to the pub last night for Jason's birthday and as a joke, the barman spiked everyone's drink. I was so annoyed that I went to the manager and got the barman fired'.

'This has something to do with the medication that I am taking; I promise I have not been doing drugs'.

'I was in the company of people who were lighting lollies and I must have inhaled some of the surrounding air! That's why I'm testing positive'.

'These home tests are inaccurate; I think you should take my urine sample to a proper lab for testing'.

By the way, based on the last explanation, I did take the urine sample to the pathologists and guess what...the home kit was 100% accurate. But little action was taken as we were once again bamboozled and manipulated into giving her the benefit of the doubt.

The unpredictable behavior continued unabated; coming home in the early hours of the morning, without us knowing where she was or what might have happened....being told that her cell phone was off or she did not receive the frantic messages asking where she was and if she was OK....on her return home, going through patches of hyperactivity and agro and then crashing for three days at a time.....losing her normal complexion and starting to pick at her skin.....continuously leaving burnt candles under her bed – in hindsight, obviously used for heating her lolly! And despite earning a fair salary, being continuously broke by day 2 or 3 of every new month.

Common sense keeps telling you that the problem is real & you should be doing something about it, but you keep on getting sidetracked by the fact that it is your own flesh & blood that deserves the benefit of the doubt. Towards the end of November the writing was on the wall that something was drastically wrong. One afternoon, having arrived home from work, looking worse for wear and in 'turnoff mode', my daughter happened to leave her handbag in the dining room. Once again Mom's sixth sense kicked in and she decided to look inside the handbag. At the bottom of the bag, she came across a strange looking glass pipe with a bubble on the end, together with a cut off straw with heat sealing on one end. She was not sure what these items were and stowed them away until I arrived home from work. Having dealt with the late Adele Searle (a strong lobbyist against drug abuse in the 80's & 90's) on a drug rehabilitation project many years back, I felt as if a train had hit me when I saw the items. I had to break the news to my wife that this was actually a Tik lolly that she had found and the cut off straw was the container in which Tik is normally sold. It then hit home as to why on previous occasions, bar this one, she had continuously taken her handbag to bed with her.

Any sense of cool-headedness at this stage flies straight out the window; when my daughter woke up I let rip at her, only to be told that she was carrying the items for one of her friends and she would not do it again. Having severely chastised her for doing such a stupid thing and warning her of the consequences, the lolly and straw disappeared rapidly the following morning – she claimed that she had tossed it into a dustbin outside the shopping centre where she worked....who will ever know???

Christmas and most of January went by and the situation was worsening. Many more workdays were being missed, waking periods were frenetic and confrontational and when the crash happened after each episode there were 3 days of continuous sleep. Money, petrol cards and valuables began to go missing.....unexpected withdrawals from the ATM. Eventually, having spent a fair wack on test kits and getting very few negative results, the time had come to seek help, bearing in mind that my daughter was no longer a minor, still employed and still refusing to admit that crystal meth had now become the master of everything around her.

My wife and I spent hours on the phone and the internet researching the subject; enquiring after credible clinics, or government run initiatives in the area.....nothing of substance; looking at private rehab facilities slightly further afield, knowing full well that our daughter would refuse to go to any in-house programme, especially due to the fact that she was still working. Then by chance, my wife happened to be given Sarah Fisher's name by the pharmacist. I contacted her and told her what we had been going through for the last 2 months and mentioned a few of the changes that we had experienced, still not sure if we were dealing with recreational use or abuse. That is when for the first time, someone said directly to me 'Your child is addicted'. The ongoing lying, manipulation, stealing and deceit are crystal meth talking back at you, not your daughter'. The rude awakening had happened...it was now time to get help fast. But dealing with a person who is no longer a minor and in total denial, leaves you with 2 choices; wait until they reach rock bottom and ask for help themselves, or use whatever it takes to persuade them that they have turned the corner from being a user to becoming an abuser. More about that next week.....

LOOK FOR THE SIGNS – THEY ARE VIRTUALLY 100% CONSISTENT AMONGST DRUG ABUSERS:

- Loss of affection and lack of interest in family, old friends and personal hygiene
- Change in routine
- Lack of money shortly after payday
- Paranoia and lying
- Money & items going missing from the house
- Unexpected withdrawals at ATM's
- Unauthorised petrol card usage; one of the favourite ways to pay for drugs. Fill the dealers car with petrol on your parent's card
- Unpredictable behavior and aggression
- Unexpected trips in your motor vehicle; keep a log of mileage when your kids borrow the car
- Long periods of staying awake, followed by long periods of sleep. Further into addiction, periods of staying awake get shorter and crashes get longer, due to the body requiring more of the drug to 'operate normally'
- A change in the company they keep; not usually for the better
- Clandestine phone calls; probably to a dealer
- Slipping out of the house for periods of time
- Weight loss and breakouts or lesions on the skin
- Drugs & strange equipment in the bedroom such as pipes, lollies, straws, powder, crystals, pills or any other strange packaging

IF THEY AGREE TO TESTING:

- Use a 5 panel drug test, available from your pharmacy for R50-R60 per kit
- Be present in the bathroom or toilet when the urine specimen is produced
- Ensure that products with a bleach base are not in the surrounds of testing; these can be used to mask results
- If results are positive, confront the issue in a calm way (as hard as it may seem); anger and threats cause further denial & withdrawal

LASTLY:

- Believe in your 6th sense as a parent and don't let ongoing doubt cloud your actions; the sooner the problem is identified, the sooner the remission process can be put in place

NEXT WEEK:

Next week's article is about seeking help and the art of gentle persuasion.