



Drugs - A parent's journey ...

Article 2

Seeking Help & The Art of Gentle Persuasion

Towards the end of January, the work situation was declining rapidly and the inconsistent personality continued unabated. Complaints were coming from my daughter's employer regarding regular absenteeism and the lack of quality in the work that she was doing. Customers used to rave about her work and now they were beginning to complain. And of course the home inconsistencies also continued, together with the refusal for help.

In the meantime, the search for suitable rehabilitation continued. Knowing the price of private rehabilitation, we first set about investigating government based initiatives, suffice to say there are no such facilities, nor any independent, accredited amenities in Somerset West; the nearest is Khayelitsha or Mitchell's Plain.

Due to continued pressure that my daughter felt she was living under at home, she decided to move in with a friend. Being an adult we did not have much say over her decision. She duly moved, but knowing what was going on made everyone more worried and insecure.

Then the dreaded call came from my daughter's employer, who informed us that she had locked herself in the toilet and had some kind of 'breakdown', which had necessitated informing her to phone Mom to take her home. She informed her employer that she had phoned Mom, but once again she had phoned someone else and was not contactable for a long period of time. Only much later did we hear from her own mouth that the craving was so great that she was even doing drugs at work.

When she did finally contact us, we persuaded her to come home and in a calm persuasive manner, informed her that we had made an appointment for her to see a highly qualified addiction specialist in Cape Town. We had to use a certain amount of emotional blackmail and told her that we could get a court order to admit her; not directly for the drug problem but for not having the ability to manage her money properly (this is a loophole on which one can capitalize if the situation gets desperate, even if the addict is no longer a minor). Under duress, she agreed to go but still tried to persuade us that she did not have a problem that she could not fix herself. The consultation with this particular specialist was disastrous. She tested positive in his presence, refused to listen to what he was saying (apparently he was too probing & tough) and we hit yet another brick wall, remembering that rehabilitation cannot be forced.

We then decided to see a clinical psychologist in Somerset West who had previous experience in addictions. My wife & I went without our daughter for the first meeting and once again we were told that without consent and the willingness to attend meetings from our daughter, there was no way to fix the problem other than to let her fall deeper into the dark abyss of crystal meth addiction. However she did say that if we could persuade her to attend the first consultation, she would try her best to get her to attend follow-ups. Somehow she managed to gain some kind of confidence from my daughter and she started seeing the psychologist every week. On her fourth consultation, the

breakthrough occurred, but not as expected. Our daughter went into toxic shock in the psychologist's rooms; this was the breakthrough (however rough and unsympathetic it may sound); she had scared herself into a brief sense of rationality, where she knew that continuing with this abuse would eventually be the end of her. She had indirectly asked for help! But don't think at this stage, she could stop using; crystal meth has an addiction factor far greater than any other drug and it had already changed the chemistry of the brain. Even though she knew that she needed help, she had very little control over what the brain and the body were crying out for.... another rush, just to get the levels right. Normality had become total abnormality!

Having done all of the research, we were finally given the name of an addiction specialist in Paarl who runs an outpatients' programme and arranged a meeting with him. Once again the first meeting was disastrous, still full of lies and deception and the attitude of doing it for her parents and not herself. Another dead end..... In desperation, I wrote my daughter a letter, telling her what a great person she was and how we loved her, but also telling her that we could not help her if she was not open with us. This little push (in writing and not just in words) seemed to reach the small bit of affection and rationality that she had left in her and that is when she signed the contract to attend an outpatients' rehabilitation programme. The breakthrough had come, her problem was going to be sorted quickly.....or so we thought.

Learnings

- Addicts who have not come to terms with their addictions cannot solve their addiction for themselves. **As difficult as it may seem at the time, they need the support of their loved ones.**
- As a parent, you need to assist in 'closing the circle' on bad friends and other abnormal and unpredictable situations that may be occurring.
- You also need to apply some tough love; lock valuables away, including their's and don't give them money, just because you feel sorry for them.
- Check your bank statements every day to ensure that there have not been any unexpected withdrawals.
- You may at the time of need think that any help is good help, but if you have the luxury of choosing a suitable form of rehabilitation, make sure that it does not alienate your child or loved one even further. Some rehabilitation centres believe in breaking down the person prior to commencing with a rehabilitation programme. This has an adverse effect on some personalities.
- Make sure that the rehabilitation programme is registered or accredited; the Helderberg Basin has a bad track record in this regard, where therapists have hidden behind their 'good intentions' to either feed their own addictions or increase their undercover drug dealing business.
- Don't instantly commit to any programme if you cannot afford to keep the addict in rehabilitation for a longer period than 1 month. In many cases, short term rehabilitation does not allow for dopamine levels to adjust to normal; therefore, the chance of relapse is fairly high. Rehabilitation is ongoing and the process can be months if not years, remembering **that addiction is a chronic illness.**
- As parents you may feel embarrassed, frustrated and alone, but the most important advice that I can give at this stage is **seek a support group or ensure that the rehabilitation programme for the addict includes a family support programme.** You cannot handle the abnormal circumstances if you do not understand the science and the psychology that comes with addiction. This is a traumatic time in which you need to manage the addict and at the same time endeavor to run a normal household.

Next week's article is about entering a rehabilitation programme and managing triggers.