

DRUGS: TOUGH QUESTIONS, STRAIGHT ANSWERS

1 videocassette, 19 minutes
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Produced for Rainbow Educational Media
by Jacoby/Storm Productions, Inc.

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INTRODUCTION

No one disputes the pervasiveness of drug use in our society, nor the damage that can be done to young lives by smoking, drinking and the so-called "hard" drugs. But all the efforts of schools and families and even governments have done little to curb the endless fascination that some children have for the experimental use of dangerous substances.

One of the problems seems to be the gap between what children hear and what they see. On the one hand, they're regaled with the horrors of drug use; on the other, they see rock stars, sports heroes and even those adults closest to them indulging in these horrors. Why do adults who should know better do things that can harm them? Why are some drugs - i.e., tobacco and alcohol - advertised, sold openly and used constantly in popular television shows? If drugs are really so bad, why are they so widespread?

Those are some of the tough questions that this program attempts to answer. By telling the truth without embellishment, by explaining why there's a gap between what kids hear and what they see, "Drugs: Tough Questions, Straight Answers" responds to the confusion that many young people feel about drug use.

It is important that the viewing of this video be followed by a class discussion so that your class can follow the lead of the program and ask those questions that most concern them. (There is an optional break in the middle of the program as well, for teachers who wish to stop for discussion.) In a nonthreatening, nonjudgmental atmosphere, students will often start by talking about the issues presented in the program, and then go on to reveal their own feelings and conflicts. By sharing these feelings, youngsters come to realize that they are not alone in their uncertainties. They begin to understand that some decisions they make as children can have a long-lasting effect and to realize that support and advice are often available for the asking.

In leading a discussion about the dangers of drug use, it is recommended that the teacher have reliable resources available to provide facts and statistics. It is also recommended that the teacher act as a facilitator rather than an instructor. This will encourage questions and allow students to air their own misconceptions, erroneous information and skepticism, without prejudice.

The facilitator's role is:

- to make sure all students know their comments are welcome and valuable
- to refrain from judgmental commentary, good or bad, on whatever is being said
- to keep more articulate students from monopolizing the discussion, and to make sure that no student feels intimidated
- to turn back questions to the class rather than answering them, unless they are questions of fact
- to understand that students' backgrounds, experiences and sense of values may differ widely
- to establish the ground rules: no putting down of others, no teasing, laughing, making fun or interrupting

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- to explain some of the seeming conflicts between what children hear about drugs and what they see around them
- to help students understand why some people use drugs and what drug use can do to their lives
- to help students respond appropriately when offered drugs in any form and to resist peer pressure to use drugs
- to help students realize the special needs of a young body and a young mind
- to help students identify the reasons for drug use
- to help students recognize when their problems are becoming overwhelming, and to provide them with resources for solving them

SUMMARY OF THE PROGRAM

Outside an after-school clubhouse, 10-year-old Jana and a counselor, Mike, are waiting for Jana's friend, Kevin; but when Kevin arrives, it's only to say that he can't stay long – he's been grounded for smoking. In the friendly discussion that follows, Mike reinforces the dangers of nicotine and tar and Kevin, whose mother smokes, asks why cigarettes are sold if they're so dangerous. Mike recognizes that this is a tough question, to which he gives an honest answer.

Then the kids ask questions about alcohol: Jana's father says "wine is good for you"; Kevin's older brother says beer is okay because it's "different". Again, Mike puts these myths to rest with straight answers, emphasizing that what may be acceptable in moderation

for adults can seriously damage young bodies and minds, so much more susceptible to addiction. He also points out that adults have the education and experience to make those choices, while kids don't.

When Kevin says he thinks he could stop drinking before he got intoxicated, Mike introduces Jamie, a teen-age alcoholic who started drinking in 5th grade and who had an automobile accident in which a friend was seriously injured. He explains that he had to go to work to pay for his friend's medical bills, but thinks he was lucky because he didn't go to jail.

An optional break in the program allows teachers to stop at this point for discussion.

When the program resumes, Jana wants to know about marijuana; she has some friends who use it and say it makes them feel good. "What's wrong with feeling good?", she asks; another tough question. Mike offers some facts about the dangers and long-lasting effects of THC; he explains that it does make some people forget their troubles for a while, but points out that the troubles will be right there waiting when the THC wears off. "The best way to escape from a problem is to solve it", he says.

Getting high on cough medicine or sniffing aerosol cans is also discussed, as is the easy switch from "gateway" drugs to crack cocaine, LSD and angel dust. Mike introduces Stephanie, who almost died after experimenting with hard drugs. "I realized", she says, "that as long as I was on drugs, I wasn't going to grow up at all."

Kevin asks about the use of drugs by rock stars and athletes and, again, Mike attempts to put that problem into perspective that kids can understand. Then he recaps all the important points made during the program, ending with, "Your job right now is to grow up healthy, learn all you can and prepare for a happy and productive life. You can't do that if you're spaced out on drugs all the time."

The program ends as Mike offers some advice on how to say "no" to drugs, and offers to walk Kevin home to explain to his Dad why he's late.

DISCUSSION/ACTIVITIES

1. Discuss the reasons for drug use and how they might apply to your particular students. The following are some reasons suggested by the "No-nonsense Parents' Guide" by Sheila Fuller and Leigh Rudd, published by Parents' Pipeline, Greenwich, CT 06831:

Peer pressure & acceptance	Low self-esteem
Escape from problems	Availability of drugs
To overcome nervousness	Failure in school
Permissiveness at home	Boredom
Depression	Curiosity
To assert independence	Genetic predisposition
Rebellion	Absence of standards
Role models who use drugs	Feelings of invulnerability

2. Discuss alternate ways of dealing with each of the reasons that seem most valid to your class.

3. Invite a local drug counselor or recovering addict to talk to the class and be open to their questions.

4. Ask your students to interview a number of adults about smoking and drinking; then have them prepare a chart or graph which indicates the pattern of adult use in your community: how many adults have quit smoking, how many would like to quit, how many drink, what and how often, etc. (Note: The questions for interviewing should be prepared by the teacher and the class beforehand.)

5. Role-play ways to say "no" to the offer of drugs, using all the typical arguments students hear: "Don't be a baby", "One time won't hurt", "Everybody's doing it", etc. (Note: Not all students are comfortable with role-playing; ask for volunteers.)

6. Have your students draw pictures of activities that make them feel good or that help them to solve problems. Post the pictures in the classroom.

7. In the program, Mike says that you can't grow up if you're on drugs. What does he mean by that? What parts of growing up would you miss if all you cared about was getting high?

8. Ask students where they think they might be able to go for help with family or school problems. Tell them about any resources they may have missed. If, during the discussion, it becomes obvious that a youngster faces drug abuse problems at home, be sure that a school counselor is made aware of the situation.

VOCABULARY TO DISCUSS

Addiction
Aerosol cans
Alcoholic
Angel Dust
Bronchitis
Cancer
Carbon monoxide
Chemical
Chewing tobacco
Circulatory system
Cirrhosis
Crack (cocaine)
Emphysema
Heart disease
Hepatitis
LSD
Marijuana
Nicotine
Snuff
Strokes
Tar
Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)

SCRIPT

Mike: So, you want to play some ping-pong?

Jana: Not with you. You're too good. I'll wait for Kevin.

Mike: Okay. How was school today?

Jana: Good. I got an "A" on my spelling test.

Mike: Way to go, Jana!

Mike: Hi, Kev. Where've you been?

Jana: We were waiting for you to play ping-pong.

Kevin: I can't play ping-pong. I have to go home.

Mike: You just got here.

Kevin: Yeah, but my Dad said I could walk over just to tell you I'm not allowed to stay long.

Mike: Uh, oh. You want to come in and tell me what happened?

Kevin: Sure.

Mike: So, what happened?

Kevin: Tommy and I were smoking.

Jana: Smoking?

Kevin: Well, trying it out. Tommy's brother gave him a couple of cigarettes.

Jana: Yuk. How could you smoke after what Mr. Elliott said about cigarettes?

Mike: You've talked about smoking in school?

Jana: A lot.

Kevin: Yeah, a lot. But how come everyone says cigarettes are so bad for you when my mom smokes and Tommy's brother smokes? If cigarettes were really so bad, they wouldn't sell them, would they?

Mike: Those are tough questions, Kevin. It must be confusing to hear how bad smoking is and then see someone grown up – someone you look up to – doing it.

Kevin: Yeah.

Mike: Let me try to give you some straight answers.

First of all, smoking IS bad for you – very bad. That's because tobacco contains nicotine and tar – and they're both poisonous chemicals.

Nicotine actually changes the way your brain works. So, when you start smoking, you don't want to stop; that's called becoming addicted.

Tar in cigarettes coats your lungs with a gooey, poisonous substance that prevents them from expanding. After a while, smokers can't breathe normally; they may develop bronchitis or even a disease called emphysema, which can't be cured.

That poisonous tar also causes cancer – in the lungs if you smoke, and in the mouth if you chew tobacco or use what's called snuff. Thousands of smokers die of cancer every year, and as if that weren't enough, the carbon monoxide in the

smoke winds up in your blood vessels and in your heart. So more people who smoke die of heart disease and strokes, a lot more than people who don't use tobacco at all. It's a pretty crazy thing to do.

Kevin: I know all that; they taught us in school.

Jana: So why did you smoke? It's disgusting.

Mike: It's because you see grown-ups doing it, and it makes you feel like a grown-up, too. Right?

Kevin: I guess.

Mike: Well, the truth is that most grown-ups started smoking when they were kids, and most of them wish they hadn't started.

Kevin: My Mom says that sometimes.

Mike: Does she want to quit?

Kevin: Yeah, but she says it's hard.

Mike: It is hard. She's become addicted to the chemical, the nicotine in her body.

Jana: Will she ever be able to stop?

Mike: If she really wants to. Her body will crave the nicotine at first - that's what makes it so hard - but, after a while, that goes away, and she'll definitely feel better when she stops poisoning her body.

Kevin: I still don't understand why they sell cigarettes if they're so bad for you.

Mike: Kevin, tobacco is a big industry in this country. When they first started to grow tobacco in the United States, no one knew that it was bad for you.

The people who made cigarettes wanted everyone to smoke more and more, so they advertised smoking as if it made you...well, grown-up and self-confident and relaxed.

It became such a popular habit that everybody – from movie stars to Presidents – thought it was okay to “light up a cigarette”.

That’s changing now that we know the terrible damage that tobacco can do. There are warnings on packs of cigarettes, and new laws that cut advertising way down – not enough, in my opinion, but it’s better than it was, and it’s illegal for kids to buy any tobacco products.

Jana: It’s illegal for kids to buy beer, too, but that doesn’t stop them from drinking it.

Kevin: That’s another thing I don’t understand. Alcohol’s supposed to be so bad, but everybody drinks.

Jana: My Mom and Dad drink wine.

Kevin: My brother drinks beer.

Jana: People drink in the movies and on TV – all the time.

Mike: Hey, I have a drink once in a while, too.

Kevin: That’s what I mean. Everybody drinks. So why do they tell us not to?

Mike: Kevin, are you allowed to drive a car? Or get married?

Kevin: Of course not.

Mike: So there are some things that grown-ups do that kids can't. You haven't had enough education or experience yet to make those choices. You're just not ready, and your body's not ready, either.

The truth is that kids can become addicted to nicotine and alcohol much, much faster than grown-ups. A kid's body doesn't react to chemicals the way an adult body does. After just a few months, sometimes just a few weeks, you can become addicted.

Kevin: Mr. Elliot said that alcohol damages your heart and your liver – is that true?

Mike: Is it ever! Alcohol is a poison, just like nicotine, tar and carbon monoxide, and the younger you are, the worse the effects.

Alcohol contributes to cancer and heart disease in a big way. Thousands of people die each year of alcohol-related illnesses.

Normally, your liver gets rid of poisons in the body, but if you overload it with alcohol, you can get hepatitis and then cirrhosis of the liver, which is fatal.

Kevin: But drinking beer is supposed to be fun, like in the TV commercials – that's why they drink it at parties, isn't it? To have fun?

Mike: Alcohol affects your brain, so it can make you feel a little silly, a little happy – what they call "high". That's why there's so much alcohol at parties, but here's the difference between kids and adults; most kids drink because their friends are drinking and they want to know what it feels like. They want to get drunk. They think losing control and going kind of crazy is cool.

Adults, unless they're addicted to alcohol – what we call alcoholism – don't want to lose control; they think not knowing what you're doing is dumb – and dangerous.

No responsible person, for example, would ever drive a car if he/she felt even a little bit woozy from alcohol, but a lot of kids do, and they kill themselves and other people that way. Every year, thousands of teenagers die in accidents caused by drinking.

Jana: But what if you know when to stop? Then drinking is okay, isn't it?

Mike: It doesn't work that way, Jana, not for kids. Knowing when to stop and being able to stop are two different things. You could already be addicted to alcohol – and then you don't want to stop.

Or you could be with kids who are still drinking and saying, "have another beer", or whatever, and then it's very, very hard to stop. Especially if you're a little high.

Better not to start at all.

Kevin: Not even beer?

Mike: Not even beer.

Kevin: My brother says beer isn't like hard liquor.

Mike: Well, beer is easy to get, even though it's illegal for kids, and it's usually cheaper. That's why most kids start with beer. But one can of beer has just as much alcohol as a shot of whisky or a glass of wine. That's a simple fact.

Jana: My Dad says wine is good for you.

Mike: It may be that a glass of wine is good for a grown-up, but it isn't good for kids. Kids can't handle alcohol – physically or emotionally.

Kevin: I think I could stop when I wanted to.

Mike: Kevin, I want you to meet a friend of mine who's had a lot of experience with alcohol – and he's still a teenager. This is Jamie.

Jamie: I started drinking with my friends when I was maybe in 5th or 6th grade, just beer and just on the weekends. At first it made me sleepy – then, after a couple of times, it made me sick. I'd have 3 or 4 beers, come home and puke for an hour. The next day I'd feel awful.

I know – why did I keep on drinking? Well, I was kind of ashamed of getting sick, so I didn't tell anybody. I figured it would go away if I just kept on drinking, and it did. I guess my tolerance for alcohol got better, cause pretty soon I could drink more and more without puking.

By the time I got to high school, I was drinking every day, and it didn't matter what. I'd even bring a bottle to school. Everything was okay as long as I could have a drink. I was already an alcoholic, but I sure didn't know it.

I did okay in school for a while, but finally I started flunking. I was such a mess by then, I didn't even care. All I cared about was getting a drink.

One day, I went out joy-riding with a friend after a few drinks.

I was so drunk, I cracked up the car and my friend got hurt; he's still in a wheel chair, and I'll be working the rest of my life to help pay his medical bills, but I was lucky. I didn't go to jail, and I got sober real fast. It's been rough, but I haven't had a drink in almost a year. Some day maybe I'll finish high school.

Mike: Do you think Jamie was lucky? Why do you think it took so long for him to realize that he was an alcoholic? What might have happened to him?

We're going to ask you to stop the program now so you can talk about tobacco and alcohol. Here are some other questions you might want to discuss:

Why do kids start using tobacco and alcohol?

Are there other ways to have a good time, to feel "high"?

Are there other ways to feel grown-up?

(STOP PROGRAM FOR DISCUSSION)

Mike: I hope Jamie answered some of your questions, Kev.

Kevin: Yeah. I wonder if my brother ever got sick on beer.

Mike: Maybe you should ask him.

Kevin: I think I will.

Jana: I have a question, Mike.

Mike: Shoot.

Jana: Well, there are these kids down the block – they smoke pot. I can tell by the smell. They say pot makes them feel good – you know, if something's worrying them, the pot just takes the bad feeling away.

So what's wrong with something if it makes you feel so good?

Mike: That's another tough question, Jana. I'll try to give you a

straight answer.

First of all, your friends are right about one thing: pot does make most people forget their troubles – for a little while, but pot, or marijuana, can't make their troubles disappear. So when they stop smoking it, they still have to face whatever's bothering them.

Whether it's trouble at school or at home or with your friends, the best way to escape from a problem is to solve it.

Jana: I guess nobody thinks about that.

Mike: Marijuana creates its own problems, too.

The poisons that are in cigarettes are also in "joints" – only more so. More cancer, more emphysema, more breathing problems, and on top of that, pot has its own poison: tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC. THC is particularly dangerous because it stays in the body a long time. If you smoke just one joint, you can test positive for marijuana for up to 8 weeks.

THC is scary stuff: it can cause panic attacks – sometimes the very first time you use it – and it does strange things to your brain, like distorting your sense of time and place. You don't ever want to drive with someone who's used pot.

I've seen pictures of people's brains after they've smoked a lot of marijuana – not a pretty sight.

It's true you don't go stumbling around like you might after a few beers. But THC steals the energy you need to be a successful human being. If you waste a few years now smoking pot, you could be playing catch-up for a long time.

Kevin: But didn't everybody smoke pot back in the 60's?

Mike: Well, not everybody – not by a long shot – but it was

popular, mostly in college.

But marijuana is much stronger now, with far more chemical additives. That's another reason you should stay away from it.

Kevin: I have another question.

Mike: Okay.

Kevin: Some of my friends say you can get high on cough syrup or by sniffing things they sell in the drug store. If that's true, why don't they just stop selling those things?

Mike: Because those products have a good use, Kevin. It would be a shame to take them off the shelves just because some people don't use them the way they're supposed to.

For example: Let's say your doctor prescribes some cough medicine for you. You use it as directed, and your cough gets better. But suppose you drank the whole bottle at once because someone said you could get high on it. You might get high, but you'd probably get awfully sick, too. That's what they mean when they talk about abusing drugs.

And sniffing some kinds of aerosol cans can make you dizzy – if that's what you want to be – but you're putting another unknown chemical into your body. It's the only body you've got; are you sure you want to take the chance?

Jana: I'm sure I don't. So why do teachers and parents and everybody keep saying, "Be careful – you could be a crackhead or a dope fiend or something".

Mike: It's not that they don't trust you, Jana. But they're worried. They know that drug abuse can sneak up on you.

Some kids drink a few beers, then a few more and wind up

drinking anything. Other kids try pot because their friends smoke it and pretty soon somebody says: "You like that, why not try this?"

That's the way you get hooked – without even realizing it. And that's why some kids go on to what we call hard drugs like crack or LSD or angel dust. I think you ought to meet Stephanie. She didn't want to take a chance with her body, either.

Stephanie: I only used pot because this boy I liked used it, and I figured a couple of times wouldn't hurt.

I didn't know that this boy ran around with kids who did hard drugs. They kept saying, "one time won't hurt" and "this is going to make you feel great."

They were even into stealing to get enough money to buy the drugs. I knew about it, but I didn't tell anybody.

I still don't know what happened that night, but I wound up in the hospital having my stomach pumped out. I never did get hooked on anything, but I almost died. And I realized that as long as I was on drugs, I wasn't going to grow up at all.

Mike: Stephanie learned it the hard way – you stop growing up when you start using drugs. It's not just school work you blow off; you never learn how to talk to people or prepare for a job or how to have a good time without using chemicals.

So, when you do stop, you're years behind everyone else.

Kevin: There's one thing I still don't understand.

Mike: Tell me.

Kevin: Why do some famous ball players and rock stars do

drugs? I mean, they must know they could lose their jobs or go to jail or even die. Don't they care?

Mike: Most celebrities don't use drugs, Kevin – you just hear a lot about the ones who do.

But I think one of the reasons some do is that they're frightened. They go to the top awfully fast, and maybe they're scared they're not going to stay there.

They see drugs all around them, they're easy to get and when they're high, they don't feel so scared.

Kevin: But the drugs don't help, they hurt.

Mike: You know that, and I know that – and Jana knows that, too – but there are a lot of kids out there who don't believe it yet.

Maybe going over some of the things we've talked about will help.

First of all, drugs are dangerous. They're chemicals, and chemicals can destroy your body.

That includes tobacco – cigarettes, cigars, pipes, chewing tobacco and snuff.

It includes alcohol – beer, wine, hard liquor. Tobacco and alcohol can do permanent damage to a young body. Don't risk it!

Illegal drugs include marijuana, cocaine and crack, heroin, LSD, angel dust, speed and all the latest drug fads that become popular from time to time. Only one word describes them all: deadly.

Second, some things that adults do in moderation can be terribly

damaging to young people. A kid's body is a lot more sensitive to drugs.

Third, there are a lot of good drugs out there, and you might need them someday if you're sick. Don't abuse them for what you think is fun.

Fourth, problems won't go away if you get high. They'll be right there waiting for you when you come crashing down to earth.

Fifth, your job right now is to grow up healthy, learn all you can and prepare yourself for a happy and productive life. You can't do that if you're spaced out or high on drugs all the time.

Jana: One more question. Everybody says, "just say no", but no one tells you how.

Mike: Good point. Well you could just say, "I don't smoke" or "I don't drink" or "I don't do drugs". You'll find that most kids will respect you for it; if some don't, you don't want those kids as friends, anyway.

Kevin: You could say, "I have to study for a test..."

Jana: Or, "I have a stomach ache..."

Kevin: Or, "My father would be very angry..." My father! I forgot he said to come right home!

Mike: Tell you what, Kevin. We'll all walk over together, and I'll explain why you're late.

Jana: Tell him you'll never smoke again...

Kevin: I won't ever smoke again, believe me...

THE END.