Adolescents: The Effects of Drugs and Alcohol

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**Abstract**

This paper studies the negative effects of drug and alcohol abuse among adolescents. Using online sources, we found professional advice about why alcohol and drugs for adolescents can be bad for the individual, and we also examined warning signs and methods to prevent the situation from happening. The four focus areas that we examined are at home, in school, at work, and while playing sports. This issue is major among teens across the United States and the world, and there needs to be a way to end this trend. It is hoped that this paper will influence citizens of the world to consider the future of themselves and their young loved ones in order to end alcohol and illegal drug abuse among adolescents forever.

Adolescents: The Effects of Drugs and Alcohol

Alcohol and drug use among adolescents is a hot topic in America and the world today. Many people have their opinion about the issues of alcohol and drugs, some being positive and others being negative. There are many ways that alcohol and illegal drugs, such as marijuana, can affect one’s performance. Below, we are going to examine the effects on alcohol and drug abuse on adolescents at home, at school, at work, and while playing sports.

**At Home**

One of the main places that adolescents are found is in their homes. This is where they eat, sleep, and play. Usually home environments are happy and stress free, but bringing alcohol and/or drugs into this space can be threatening to the family that resides there. Alcohol can be detrimental to relationships between partners, parents and children, or even the family as a whole. The American Addiction Centers (n.d)outlined four negative effects of bringing alcohol into the home. The first example is neglecting important duties. No matter what age, everyone has responsibilities. If you are a child, responsibilities start with making the bed in the morning or helping set the table for dinner. As the child gets older, responsibilities get progressively more difficult such as washing dishes or taking the trash out. The American Addiction Centers (n.d) states that alcohol, “impairs one’s cognitive functions and physical capabilities” (The American Addiction Centers, para. 2). Mixing household chores and alcohol can inhibit the full function of an adolescent. In addition, it can take more time or be more difficult than doing it sober. The next factor that effects adolescents’ home life if they drink alcohol is the hangover aspect. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines a hangover as, “disagreeable physical effects following heavy consumption of alcohol or the use of drugs” (Merriam-Webster, 2018). Hangovers make any person, especially adolescents, feel nauseous, sick, and could cause a headache. Hangovers take time to cure, and can cause the adolescent to miss out on fun activities such as spending time with family and friends.

Drugs are also a major cause of problems at home. Not only are they illegal, but they can destroy relationships the same way as alcohol. Drugs can cause a human to not think clearly, and then in turn can cause them to make poor decisions. This is especially true in adolescents because their brains are not fully developed yet. I have a personal experience with this. About a year ago, a friend of mine made a bad choice while he was under the influence of drugs. For the sake of this paper and his confidentiality, let us call him Mike. One night, Mike decided to go over to another girl’s house and use marijuana, which is an illegal drug. As the night went on, Mike started to feel worse and worse. The female that he was with tried to do things that Mike was not comfortable with because he had a girlfriend. In the end, Mike cheated on his girlfriend. When Mike walked into her house earlier in the night, he had no intention of being unfaithful to his girlfriend. But when he walked out of her house, he knew that his life had changed. Mike’s actions may have been drastically different if only he had not used those illegal drugs. They changed his ability to reason and think, causing him to make a poor choice. Because of this incident, Mike lost a very special person to him. He lost a relationship that could have turned into something greater than either of them could have imagined. As we can see, drugs are a negative object, and can cause adolescents to make negative choices that will affect them in the future. The positive part of this story is that it all could have been prevented. With the proper education and information, we can eliminate drug use to benefit adolescents at home.

**At School**

School is another situation where alcohol and drug usage can be dangerous to adolescents. Personally, I was first introduced to alcohol in high school. While I never drank alcohol or did drugs in high school, I was aware that it was around. I heard fellow students in the hallway talking about going to parties or drinking before football games. One day in class I even heard a couple of girls planning to have a party the following weekend.

Drugs affect many factors of an adolescent’s life, one of which is their school environment. Illegal drugs can have a negative effect on grades, friendships, and even the future of the student. According to Just Think Twice (2018), “A study of teens in 12th grade (16-18 years of age) who dropped out of school before graduation are more likely than their peers to be users of cigarettes, alcohol, marijuana and other illicit drugs” (How does drug use affect your high school grades? section, para 10). This study proves that by staying in school and getting an education, adolescents are less likely to get involved with illegal behavior. The website then goes on to say that, “nearly one-third of school dropouts indicate that their use of alcohol or other drugs was an important contributor in their decision to leave school” (How does drug use affect your high school grades? section, para 12). As previously stated, staying in school ensures a successful student. The adolescent will then graduate high school, possibly go on to college, and then start a job earning money for their future. When a student drops out of high school, the opposite happens. Usually the teen will get a minimum wage job that pays just enough money to support themselves. The addiction of drugs on top of that is not healthy, as it costs a lot of money and takes a huge physical toll on the body. Physically, when a human engages in illegal drugs, it results in a harder time concentrating, remembering things, and learning. School is hard enough as it is, I cannot even imagine having to focus on my schoolwork while dealing with this bad habit.

This information will be useful to me in my future classroom, as I am working towards becoming a teacher. Because teachers spend countless hours with their students on a day to day basis, they begin to understand their students’ personality and habits. Warning signs can be the first step to the start of an alcohol or drug abuse problem. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (2003), “Interactions outside the family can involve risks for both children and adolescents, such as: poor classroom behavior or social skills; academic failure; and association with drug-abusing peers” (What are the early signs of risk that may predict later drug abuse? section, para 4). These are signs that can be detected in a classroom as it effects academic success and social settings. As a teacher, if a student is having difficulty with these substances, I hope to be able to recognize these signs early enough to be able to get the student the help that they need.

**At Work**

The vast majority of people work because that is the process in which they earn money in order to provide for their themselves and their families. Adolescents work for numerous reasons too. Possibilities include working to buy a car, pay for college, or just to have spending money for leisure activities. As a result, most people strive to keep their jobs and the most logical step is to not use alcohol or illegal drugs while at work. In most work settings, alcohol and drugs are prohibited for staff while they are performing their duties. Getting involved in these activities can render serious consequences which can include disciplinary actions or even the loss of a job. Even if one chooses to drink alcohol or use drugs in their free time, this usage can still affect one’s job. For example, employers monitor social media to ensure the right people are working for and applying to their company. If they see a post that looks suspicious, an applicant may not even be given the chance for an interview. Or, if they already work for the company, the adolescent is at risk for losing their job. The National Council on Alcohol and Drug Dependence (2015) sum it up pretty well when they say, “Alcohol and drug use among employees and their family members can be an expensive problem for business and industry, with issues ranging from lost productivity, absenteeism, injuries, fatalities, theft and low employee morale, to an increase in health care, legal liabilities and workers’ compensation costs” (Drugs and Alcohol in the Workplace section, para 1). Not only do the choices affect the individual, but the choices can hurt the company as well. The site then goes on to list additional issues that come with alcohol and drug use in the workplace. This list includes categories such as tardiness or sleeping on the job, hangovers affecting job performance, theft, and even illegal activities happening at the work place (Drugs and Alcohol in the Workplace section, para 3). I believe that a strong workplace can help an individual to become a well-rounded human being. In addition, I think that keeping adolescents busy at work can help with the problems of alcohol and drug abuse.

**While Playing Sports**

Bradley was a friend of mine. He was the kind of person that everyone looks to as a role model. Bradley played football for our high school football team, he made perfect grades, and completed countless hours of community service. All throughout high school, Bradley had recruiters coming to watch him play football. He had a real chance of getting a scholarship to play football at a high-quality school. This was all ruined one Friday night that Bradley attended a party. He was with his friends at a fellow teammates house. They had just won the state championship and Bradley had just gotten an invitation to play at a college in Florida, so they were celebrating. Events got carried away and Bradley drank a little bit too much alcohol, especially for his young age. When it was time to leave, he got in the car and drove home. On the way home, there was an accident. Bradley was driving and missed a stop sign. Unfortunately, there was another car coming from the left and the car got hit on the side by Bradley’s car. The firetruck and ambulance came to make sure that nobody was hurt. The police came to handle the situation. Thankfully, Bradley and the occupants of the other car walked out with only scrapes and bruises, but Bradley still committed an illegal act and was therefore going to face consequences. According to Hogan Injury Law Firm (2018), “When someone neglects to obey traffic signs and signals, they are putting themselves at risk as well as other drivers, their passengers and pedestrians” (Types of Traffic Signs and Signals section, para. 2). Bradley did just this when he was driving home from the party. He failed to see a stop sign, therefore, putting himself and others at risk.

This scenario could have been prevented in multiple ways. First of all, underage drinking is illegal and should not occur in the first place. If Bradley knew he was going to be unable to drive home, he should have had a ride prearranged, or should have called someone to pick him up. Because of the alcohol, Bradley was not thinking straight and made a bad decision. Unfortunately, this decision cost Bradley his football career.

Drugs also have a negative effect on adolescents and their sports careers. The Drug and Alcohol Information and Support (2018) website lists a number of ways that drugs are detrimental to an athlete’s health, such as breathing, heart rate, concentration, and pain. Breathing can become difficult when you have a foreign substance messing with the body. Many drugs slow down breathing and decrease lung space, making it difficult to acquire necessary oxygen when exercising. The heart is one of the most important organs to athletes and the human population in general. It is one organ that we always need to be functioning properly. Some of the harder drugs such as cocaine and ecstasy put more pressure on the heart than normal. This can lead to problems with the heart such as a heart attack. As mentioned earlier, drugs affect concentration. This not only applies to school, but also in sports. The brain is needed to think about plays or to guess what the opponent is going to do next, so the loss of concentration can be detrimental to the athlete and his team. Lastly, is pain. Most times, if athletes have an injury, they know the instant it happens. Discomfort overrules the body and they know something is wrong. Drugs can impair pain receptors thus making it harder to determine. This is bad for the body because if the athlete does not know that something is wrong, he cannot fix it. In addition, injuries get worse when they are left untreated for a long period of time. Overall, it is in the best interest of the athlete and the whole team to not engage in these illegal activities.

Finally, alcohol and drugs are not good for the body of a growing teenager. Science says that an adolescent is not finished growing and maturing until age 21. This is because body parts are still developing internally and externally. Alcohol and drugs invading the body prevent the body’s ability to grow naturally. There is a reason that the legal age for drinking alcohol is 21. Illegal drugs are illegal for a reason. As adolescents are growing up and becoming young adults, they need to be focused on school, their future, and having fun. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (2014) states, “early use of drugs increases a person’s chance of developing addiction” (Preventing Drug Abuse: The Best Strategy section, para 1). If we work now to prevent adolescents from engaging in behaviors involving alcohol and illegal drugs, we can save our future generation from a lifetime of struggles with addiction.

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