

Family Connections

Happy Thanksgiving!

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Moving Beyond Stigma

Often when families are facing addiction, they are reluctant to share their struggle with anyone for fear of a negative reaction. When a family member gets a diagnosis of "cancer", family and friends gather around the patient with concern and sympathy. When a family member is an "addict", the reaction can be the opposite. Family and friends often turn away, insinuating that drug addiction is a "family problem." The stigma around substance abuse, mental illness and co-occurring disorders is strong!

Stigma is not only a learned response, but also a psychological reaction to an event. It fulfills a psychological need in an individual and is based in three conditions: pain, ambivalence and fear.

Pain is a response to the way a person's priorities shift in response to addiction. For example, as a result of his drug use an addict fails to show up for a family event, which was once important to him. This new behavior causes

emotional pain to himself and his family members. He is disappointed and ashamed in himself. His family may be frustrated and angry at his behavior.

Ambivalence speaks to the lack of understanding of addiction and the inability to empathize with the behavior. Relatives and friends watching the addict may feel sad, angry and concerned all at the same time. They may wonder, "Why can't he just quit!" An addict may feel embarrassed and guilty, but unable to quit.

Fear results from the combination of pain and ambivalence. When we witness someone else's weaknesses it reminds us of our own weaknesses. We feel uncomfortable and manage it by creating distance from the person that is causing these feelings. This defense is called stigma.

Understanding where stigma originates does not make it go away. However, appreciating its source allows us to address it and recognize when we are being stigmatized that it



is often not about us. Parents who have started along the journey of recovery say that at some point in their teen's addiction they realized they had to go on. Worrying about what other people were thinking got in the way of doing what was best for their teen. This is one way to move beyond stigma.

Educating ourselves, our families, and our communities about adolescent substance abuse and co-occurring disorders will also help us move beyond stigma and open possibilities for resources for our teens.

For more information on stigma, go to www.nami.org/stigma, www.stopstigma.samhsa.gov.

Special thanks to Pam Woll for her knowledge, research and contributions to this article.

Quote of the Month

If enough people think of a thing and work hard enough at it, I guess it's pretty nearly bound to happen, wind and weather permitting.

- Laura Ingalls Wilder

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Bipolar Disorder and Substance Use



Join Together (www.jointogether.org) reported that research suggests there is an association between Bipolar Disorder and substance use and smoking in teens. Previous research suggested a link, but the information was limited. The current study compared 105 bipolar disorder (BPD) youth with 98 youth without bipolar disorder.

The conclusion showed that 34% of the BPD teens had a substance use disorder com-

pared to 4% in the other group. Twenty-nine percent had alcohol abuse or dependence compared 3%. Drug abuse and dependence jumped to 36% compared to 2%. Of the 33 teens that were diagnosed with BPD and substance use disorder, most of them (22-67%) experienced the onset of BPD prior to the onset of their substance use disorder.

This kind of information supports the need for adolescent treatment programs to be able to address men-

tal health needs as well as substance abuse issues. When you are seeking and advocating for services for your teen, request that a mental health assessment be included as part of the initial interview process. If you have a history of mental illness in your family make sure to communicate this to the counselor. The more information counselors have, the better they will be able to help our teens!

For more information go to www.jointogether.org, click on "research news", type

Obama seeking new "Drug Czar"



President-elect Barack Obama is seeking candidates to fill his Cabinet-level position for the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) or "Drug Czar." This position has not been prominent during the current administration. However, as a member of the Cabinet this position is on par with the Secretary of State, Attorney General, etc.

All guesses at this point about who it might be are pure speculation, but retired

Rep. Jim Ramstad (R-MN) has been named as one consideration. Rep. Ramstad has been outspoken about his own recovery from alcohol and also was an aggressive advocate for the parity bill (see last month's issue for more information on the parity bill).

Those commenting on the process encourage Obama to consider someone who brings credibility and strength to the office. He or she should also view ad-

diction as a public health issue and recognize the relationship between mental health and addiction treatment. Others expand the public health issue to include HIV/Aids, Hepatitis C and other infectious diseases spread through intravenous drug use.

For more information watch www.jointogether.org, www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org and your local news source.



IFF Launches a New Website!

The Illinois Federation of Families has a brand new Website! Soon all the Family Connection Newsletters will be posted on the site, as well as links to resources for parents.

Go to www.iffcmh.net and check it out!!

(Past issues of Family Connections are currently posted on www.IllinoisTreatmentWorks.org.)

Do you have an Opinion?

The Chicago Tribune on November 17, 2008 reported disparity in how driver's-license suspension is enforced for teens. Last year a state law passed after five Oswego teenagers were killed in a drunk driving accident. The law states that "people under 21 will lose their driving privileges if they are found guilty or granted court supervision for violating laws regarding consumption, possession or purchase of alcohol 'regardless of whether a vehicle was involved.'" Three thousand teens have lost their licenses as a re-

sult of this law, but the law is enforced sporadically across the state. Critics of the law disagree with tying drinking offenses with driving offenses. Supporters say the inconsistent enforcement sends a mixed message to parents and teens and minimizes the risk.

Lake County leads the state in suspensions with 370 in the first three quarters of the year. DuPage County and McHenry County reported 358 and 230 respectively. Cook County only reported 60.

Several municipalities allow

offenders to pay a fine without reporting the offense to the state. Other municipalities want to take care of their teens "in house" and design their own consequences. Some law officials see the law as a tool to use at their discretion. In some situations the law has seemed to come to the surprise of law enforcement. Regardless the reason, the law is not being uniformly enforced across the state.

Interested in more information? Go to www.chicagotribune.com. Type in "chi-teen-alcohol" in the search engine.



Resources

Books On Adolescent Development:

The Second Family: Dealing with Peer Power, Pop Culture, The Wall of Silence by Ron Taffel with Melinda Blau, St. Martins Press, 2001.

Get Out of My Life, but first could you drive me and Cheryl to the mall?, Anthony E. Wolf, Phd., Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2002

The Primal Teen: What the new discoveries about the teenage brain tell us about our kids by Barbara Strauch. Doubleday, 2003.

Why do they act that way? A survival guide to the adolescent Brain for you and your teen. By David Walsh and Nat Bennett. Free Press, 2004.

Family Support Groups:

www.ala-non.alateen.org - a support group for individuals who are dealing with a family members addiction.

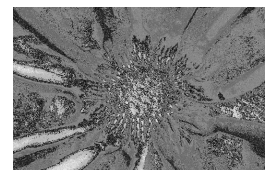
www.co-anon.org - a support group for families dealing with cocaine addiction.

www.nar-anon.org - a support group for families dealing with someone else's addiction.

www.familiesanonymous.org - a self-help group for families that are dealing with a loved one's addiction

"Mutual Support Groups are an important part of recovery from substance use disorders (SUD's). Mutual support groups exist both for persons with an SUD and for their families..."

- Samhsa (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)



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**Wondering how to receive
this Newsletter?**

**Contact Stephanie at
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Supporting Families Across Illinois



The Illinois Federation of Families is an advocacy organization that helps families and children with mental health needs seek a better quality of life.