

Answers to Parents Questions About Drugs and Alcohol

By Jim Burns

Over the years, parents have written to Jim Burns and HomeWord with questions about drug and alcohol issues.

Here are a few of the questions we have received and our responses...

Q. I would like advice on how to react to just finding marijuana in my 9th grade daughter's room. Any ideas?

A. Thank you for being proactive in this situation. Over-reaction or under-reaction will send messages you don't want to give. I suggest you set some time aside to talk openly with your daughter to find out the facts regarding the marijuana. Before you do, however, consider some of the following questions:

- How did you find the drugs? (i.e. by mistake, or searching the room)
- Does she have a history of smoking or using alcohol (gateway drugs)?
- Are you honest with her in other types of communication?
- Will you listen without condemning?
- Is she experimenting, using on a regular basis or just curious?
- Where did she get it?

I believe you should take this situation seriously. The possession of marijuana is illegal and dangerous. Help her understand that under no circumstances is she to have contact with any forms of drugs (some people do not see the harm in marijuana).

Make sure you gather the facts. Not only about her possession of the substance but be ready to hand her some stats about marijuana use. For this information you can go to www.CDC.com.

However you choose to confront her, make sure you confront her in honesty and in love. Teens still need their parents to be the authority figure. They need boundary lines and consequences for crossing them. You may want to consider outlining an agreement or contract as to what you expect from her and what will happen if the contract is broken.

Q. My son, who is 15, has been using marijuana over the course of two years. We have tried everything we can think of to stop this - praying, random drug screening with the consequence of six weeks grounding if test is positive, and even delay of driver's license for 6 months. None of these methods are working so we are contemplating seeking counseling with a psychologist who specializes in teenagers with substance abuse problems. This will be quite expensive but we are willing to make sacrifices if it stops this abuse. My question is: Will counseling be effective if my son does not see a problem with smoking marijuana? He has great grades and close friends so he thinks as long as his life is going good, why quit? I have prayed about this often but don't know how to determine what God's answer is to our dilemma. Any insight with you would be appreciated.

A. Thank you so much for getting in contact with us. Know that you are not alone in the situation that you are dealing with your son. Knowing that may not make it any easier, but know that there are others who are going through what you're experiencing.

It is true, the key to your son getting help is in him seeing that smoking marijuana is a problem. As long as he does not see that, it will be a bit of an uphill battle in getting him help.

All that being said, however, I believe that counseling would be a positive move. It may be the very thing that shows your son his problem and brings him face to face with what he is doing to his life. The truth that he is missing is that sin is fun for a while, but there are always consequences to our actions. Smoking marijuana does have side effects. The one issue for counseling for be most effective is for your son to be open to talking with someone about his drug use.

As for the counseling itself, I would make sure to let the counselor know where your son is and what he is thinking about his drug use. Good counselors are trained to be able to bring up issues and thoughts that reveal the truth. Search out a reputable, Christian counselor, one that will come at his counseling from a Christian perspective.

As for prayer, prayer is powerful. Do not give up on bringing your son and his drug problem before God's throne. He cares so very much for you and your son.

Know that the process of getting your son help may be a long process, but one definitely worth the energy.

Q. We are having trouble with our 17 year old Senior in High School. We caught him drinking and driving his vehicle. One of our rules (which he knows very clearly) is if you drink and drive and we find out, you lose your vehicle. He has come in drunk several times recently and been in trouble already for that-these times he was not driving. He has no remorse for doing this and he also broke curfew this same night. He can't understand why we are making a big deal of it and why he has to have a curfew since most of his Senior friends don't have one and they all drink also. He just seems so unconcerned for what has happened. He shows no sorrow for this misbehavior. We are at a loss on how to handle this situation. We have taken away his truck and grounded him. My question is, should we take the truck away forever and do I take him to school every day or does he have to find his own way? We have grounded him from his friends for breaking curfew so does it make sense for him to get rides to school with friends that he is otherwise grounded from? This is the hardest thing I have had to go through as a parent. I think his uncaring attitude about the whole thing is what bothers me most. Please give us some advice. We are trusting God to help us all through this trying time. Thanks.

A. It sure sounds like you have had a tough time with your son! Hang in there! You have established boundaries and consequences for his behaviors and that is good. It's not easy sticking to these consequences, especially when they make your life more difficult - as in you having to provide rides, etc. Still, staying consistent with your boundaries and consequences is important also! Remember that the discipline you are enforcing with your son has to do with two things: protection and trying to raise a mature, responsible adult. I don't sense that you are trying to punish your son - and that too - is an important value to maintain. As long as he lives at home, you are still in charge - you can set and enforce boundaries. The reality is that soon, your son will graduate and go to college and/or move out. So, do what you can now, to prepare your son for responsible, adult life.

Regarding the truck, it sounds like you need to figure out a plan on the time limit - and also additional (perhaps harsher/longer) consequences for further behavior violations. For example: first offense - lose the truck for 3 months; second offense - lose the truck for good and find your own rides.

Regarding the friends, again, I think if you haven't already laid out specific detailed consequences yet, you can adapt your consequences to grounding him from seeing his friends in social settings - and allow for rides directly to and from school. (Obviously, your son will see his friends at school anyway.)

Throughout this process, I would encourage you to do your best to communicate with your son. Explain to him why these issues are important to you - and how even if he disagrees - you are setting these boundaries for his own good. Be sure to listen to your son. You can't change his heart, but work at maintaining your relationship.

Lastly, be sure to pray a lot! God loves your son even more than you do - and He can be trusted to work in your son's life - even when it doesn't look like anything is going on - on the inside.

Even though this is the toughest time you've experienced as a parent, also know that God is with you every step along the way. Trust Him to give you wisdom and patience during these times!

To read more questions and answers on this topic, go to HomeWord.com and visit the "Real Life Answers" section of our website.

HomeWord
800.397.9725
www.homeword.com