

Judge Memorial parents discuss the threat of drugs

by Chris Young
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SALT LAKE CITY — “Drugs can often be a dark dreary topic,” said Brad Barham, president and founder of Drug Talk, a drug crisis center in Sandy, which gives parents tools, resources, and skills needed to fight drugs in the privacy of their own home.

Barham spoke at Judge Memorial Catholic High School March 29, at a semi-annual Parent-to-Parent Night to explain how parents can rise above the drug crisis facing many families.

According to Barham, research shows that 84 percent of families with children in school face a moderate to high risk of the threat of drugs. Fortunately parents can reduce this risk by up to 75 percent if they talk frequently and openly about drugs, talk credibly, and establish family values and

expectations with their children.

“Today there is a brand new world of drugs,” said Barham. “We, as parents, talk to our children about the drugs we are familiar with such as marijuana, LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide), methamphetamines, and cocaine, but then our children go to school and see other things.”

Barham said one of the biggest threats to students today is the ease with which they can obtain drugs. Today’s drugs can come from your child’s friends, the local convenience store, or your own medicine cabinet. Drugs today do not have to be smoked, snorted, or injected.

“Drugs are everywhere, and they are hidden in plain sight,” said Barham. “Methamphetamine (meth) comes in the form of chewable candy, and young girls often use it for weight loss. Drug dealers are now putting marijuana in familiar candies. Ecstasy can be purchased in pill form with characters on them such as Donald Duck, Bugs Bunny, Smurf, and Harry Potter. There are more than 1,600 different Ecstasy pills available on the illegal drug market today.

“Drug dealers are targeting children as young as 12 years old,” he said. “Narcotic agents have arrested a number of drug rings selling “Harry Potter pills” to grade school children.

“The challenge with pills is we are taught it is okay to take them,” said Barham. “Doctors prescribes pills, pills are approved by the Federal Drug Administration (FDA), and pills make you feel better. Children and teens are getting high off cough and cold medicines such as Coricidin®. If you take enough Coricidin, you can have an out of body experience. If you take too much you can die.”

Meth use is an epidemic and nine out of 10 users will become physically addicted. Meth users report that after taking the drug they experience a sudden rush of pleasure or a prolonged sense of euphoria, increased energy, the ability to focus, confidence, and feelings of desirability. However after that first high, users require more and more of the drug to get that feeling again. Over time, meth destroys dopamine receptors, a neurotransmitter in the brain, making it impossible to feel pleasure. Meth also destroys users’ teeth, and robs users of their physical health and cognitive abilities.

Barham said MDMA is the chemical name for Ecstasy. It was developed by a pharmaceutical company and was originally intended as a dietary supplement for people with weight problems until the drug’s more exciting effects became apparent. The youth associate Ecstasy with love, joy, and happiness. Parents are unaware their children



Brad Barham explains the issues surrounding today's drugs. He emphasizes a parent should never blame him or herself if a child becomes addicted to drugs, they should intervene. IC photo by Chris Young

are taking Ecstasy because they seem happy and friendly, and they think their child's behavior is improving. Ecstasy helps the child associate with reality, and therefore, it can take up to two years for parents to realize their children are taking drugs.

Barham said Ecstasy is considered the magic pill. It tricks the brain into releasing all its serotonin and dopamine. These neurotransmitters help a person overcome depression and all the stresses and challenges in life. Serotonin can only be replaced at a very slow rate and abuse of Ecstasy will lead to depression.

"OxyContin® has been approved by the FDA, but many deaths have occurred as a result of overdoses," said Barham. "OxyContin, a highly addictive drug, is only intended for moderate to severe pain. It is not intended to alter one's lifestyle by helping them sleep or feel happy."

Experts now believe the only sure way to protect young people from drugs is through parental involvement. Barham said it happens one family at a time.

"You can integrate the core communication principles through parent-child activities. Each day, stop and connect with each one of your children," said Barham. "Each week, learn something new about each child. Each month, lead a family activity with an open dialogue about drugs. Do not be afraid to talk to your children about drugs for fear you will give them information. They are either already aware of what is available, or they will find out from the wrong person."

Barham said about every four months, parents should ensure positive one-on-one time with each child. Each year parents should leave work behind and go on a family vacation.

As a parent with a child on drugs, it is important to understand the powerful influence you can have on your child by stopping the crisis-driven thoughts and creating a positive state-of-mind that is able to respond, not react, and restore the connection between you and your child. Lead your child through their healing process without judgment or condemnation. Each day, perform a personal check-in with your child in love and support, acknowledging the slightest improvement. Each week complete a personal progress review of your child's progress and setbacks, and each month allow your child to assess his or her own progress. Most importantly, parents should never blame themselves.