

The Folly of Youth

-By Vicki Burgess



The folly of youth is every parent's worst nightmare. It is a known fact that teens and young adults experiment with their new found freedoms and throw caution to the wind. Even the Book of Proverbs, written thousands of years ago, talks about it as a common occurrence. If most of us are honest with ourselves, we would all admit to having skeletons in our closet due to our own "youthful follies".

Depending on the characteristics, genetics and learned behavior of each individual can depend on how far and daring a person strays off the beaten path. Many families would tell you there is always "one" in the family willing to push the limits.

An experimenting youth can wreak havoc in their homes, taking their parents on the highs and lows of an emotional roller coaster ride. You often hear people say their children have given them grey hair. All parents can do is hold their breath and pray their children get through the rough weather safely without catastrophe.

Some parents never get the luxury of the chaos subsiding: instead, their children never seem to get out of their destructive rut even into full adulthood. While others have their world turned upside down because of a deadly action a child or loved one can make.

In America, around a hundred years ago, the common youth would only have been able to get their hands on the addictive substances of nicotine and alcohol. Plenty of them did, and of course, no one thought when they took that first drink or smoke that they would ever become addicted. These drugs alone have caused a lot of physical and psychological harm throughout the years, not only to the addict, but to others around them. Today many would agree with the idea that nicotine and alcohol have taken second place to more dangerous and deadly drugs. To make matters worse, the population of drug users have skyrocketed throughout the US. The cocktail of deadly drugs have caused alarming substance abuse trends, with accidental overdose deaths rising dramatically.

We might sit back and wonder what possesses a young adult to take a hit of heroin knowing they could instantly be addicted. Could the draw be that it is a very cheap street drug and according to the National Institute of Drug Abuse it will give you profound feelings of euphoria and relaxation?

We can only speculate the reasoning. Is it the same reason why alcoholics feel drawn to drink? Alcohol addiction can impair someone enough to make poor choices such as drinking and driving. It can do slow physical damage over time and eventually catch up to the person, while someone on heroin will have severe impairment and can overdose immediately after injecting themselves.

As parents, grandparents and family members, the devastation of losing someone to drugs is a tragedy that may never heal. Blame, guilt and shame might be some of what someone could experience.

As a society we must be aware that this nightmare is affecting more and more families. From a personal perspective, the best thing you can do for these families is to show compassion and support. Instead of avoiding the families because you feel uncomfortable, you should find ways of connecting with them. Judging or playing the blame game is futile and will not bring someone back.

Family members that have loved ones in the throes of their addiction, have the daunting task of living with an addict and not enabling them. To show support of the families of the drug abuser is to encourage them not to enable them.

It is so easy for a parent to give money or lend a car because they feel the incredible urge to provide for their children. Grandparents can also enable by leaving their medication accessible and refuse to believe their grandchild would steal from them.

As concerned friends or family, showing compassion and caring is important, but don't enable the loved one who is enabling the addict. Instead, help them find the right resources, information and services they need to help them cope. Being condescending or judgmental will only bring tension to the relationship.

It is good to remind ourselves that an addiction is never far away from any family's door step and we should treat the families of an addict the way we would want to be treated. An old well known proverb says it all, **"There but for the grace of God go I."**