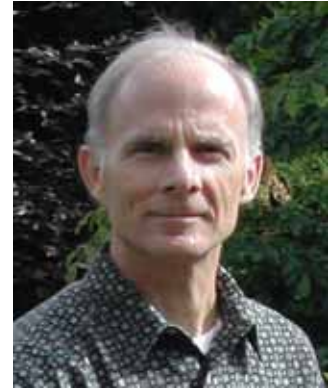


After nine years serving as hearing officer in Gresham deciding on school expulsion recommendations usually for drug or weapons violations, I have witnessed too frequently the unfortunate consequences of youth involved in drugs and the complications drugs introduce in their lives. I offer this commentary only as perspective, not answers to a vexing issue for our community, namely, how to curb dependence and use of illicit drugs including alcohol, particularly in our youth.



Customarily when one hears “drug prevention” for youth, it conjures up notions of activities designed to help them avoid situations or substances. I think this orientation is misguided as avoidance refers to a negative, an absence of something. The emphasis in prevention, in my humble opinion, should be on what is given to our youth instead. Young people don’t make decisions in a vacuum. Many lead complicated lives and are coping with family dynamics that have created unhealthy levels of anxiety, fear and uncertainty. They have witnessed the inherent weakness in human nature, but they often have not been taught how to deal effectively with the failings of others or their own emptiness. They need additional help in dealing with frustrations, setbacks or disappointments.

Secondly, I have noted that youth more prone to use drugs have not internalized a strong set of values or moral principles that guide their decision making. We parents may overlook that we teach far more potently by our example than our admonitions. If parents abuse alcohol or other substances even legal ones or equate laws with convenience it sends a strong message to our children: you can make your own laws or choose which rules you want to follow. Youth are not equipped to decide about experimenting or using drugs if they haven’t had years of support in making decisions based upon principle, ethical and moral considerations.

This leads to the third point. Youth involved with alcohol or drugs often strike me as hurting in some emotional way to their very core. They display a preoccupation with “me,” a self-centeredness brought on because the individual is needy in very fundamental ways. They may harbor hostility because bonds of trust with adults are lacking. Youth drug use is linked to the health of relationships with adults not just with their peers. This “me” oriented young person may feel alienated from friends and significant adults. Youth indeed suffer from depression and this may cause individuals to use drugs as a destructive “therapy” for what ails them.

Most of the youth who admit being dependent on drugs have given clear signals that they were abusing substances, signals often overlooked by parents. Almost to a person they were skipping classes frequently, had dramatic changes in their grades, chose friends manifesting similar behaviors, and had lost a direction or goal orientation in their lives.

The impact of drugs on people’s lives in our community is profound. What can you do?

Get involved: Getting Higher- A Courageous Community Conversation: Tuesday June 5th at Centennial Auditorium, 3505 SE 182nd, 7-9 p.m., a FREE Town Hall event. Former NASA Astronaut Don Lind presents the keynote for the panel discussion about drugs and alcohol use in the community. How does it affect crime and your teen? Be there with your neighbors and friends as Ray Summers moderates this important community dialog. Panel guests from law enforcement, education, youth services and the faith community will share important views from inside their efforts to affect this issue. Locally produced youth video, “Make a Choice,” will premier and audience questionnaire cards invite participation in the event. Join us for this opportunity to do something important in your community!

Jim Buck