

Adolescent substance abuse seminars offer education and help

By Nancy Knott, CADC-I, BRI, Scripps Memorial Hospital La Jolla

Lately your teen has been acting more distant than usual. You never know what mood he'll be in, and he doesn't want to talk about his classes or activities. He's been sleeping more than usual, and seems forgetful and distracted. Is this just normal adolescent behavior or a sign of something more serious?

That's the question that confuses many parents of adolescents with substance abuse problems. While finding drug paraphernalia among your child's things is an obvious sign of substance abuse, many other warning signs mirror typical adolescent behavior, such as:

- Mood swings or depression
- Dishonesty and secretiveness

To Your Health

- Deflecting questions about activities or money
- Anger, irritability or defensiveness
- Short-term memory loss
- Money missing in the home
- Suspicious phone calls or seemingly nonsensical text messages
- Unexplained weight loss, red eyes, poor hygiene
- Missing school or not coming home after school
- Trouble in school or with the police

Often, warning signs go undetected for a long time; research has shown that, on average, a drug problem exists for seven years before a family recognizes it and seeks help. If parents are too quick to write off these behaviors as "normal" without considering the possibility of a deeper problem, they may not realize their child has an addiction until it causes serious health, financial, or legal consequences.

Moreover, sometimes parents know that their son or daughter experiments with alcohol or drugs and misjudge or even deny the severity of the situation. Many parents experimented themselves when they were teens, and believe it is basically a harmless rite of passage. However, marijuana today is ten to twenty times stronger than it was years ago, and alcohol and drug abuse is rampant on high school and college campuses. Also, research has found more evidence of a hereditary factor in addiction; if there is a history of drug or alcohol addiction in the family, the likelihood is four times greater than average that recreational alcohol or drug use will become a full-blown addiction in adulthood.

Helping parents understand adolescent alcohol or substance abuse is the goal of the informational adolescent intervention seminars offered by the Scripps McDonald Center located on the campus of Scripps Memorial Hospital La Jolla. These weekly seminars are free and open to all parents and others interested in learning more about the widespread problem of adolescent addiction. Whether a child has a problem or not, all parents can benefit from learning about addiction and understanding what their children are exposed to on a daily basis—because no matter what school your children attend or how "good" your neighborhood is, drugs and alcohol are readily available. Along with alcohol, marijuana, cocaine and crystal meth, the list of the most popular drugs among adolescents reads like a pharmacy inventory: Oxycontin, Vicodin, Xanax, and Valium, along with over-the-counter cold medicine and household products used as inhalants, which can be deadly the first time they're used. Kids get drugs at school or on the street, steal alcohol or prescription medications from their parents, take a quick trip across the border, and pay friends or strangers to buy alcohol.

In addition to helping parents identify a substance abuse problem, intervention seminars help determine whether a child needs treatment and what kind. For example, Scripps McDonald Center conducts an Intensive Outpatient Program for some teens, while others may need residential treatment. Many people mistakenly believe that the only way to get a child into treatment is to have a transport company show up in the middle of the night and drag the child out of bed into a treatment program in the middle of nowhere. The intervention program at Scripps McDonald Center combines family intervention and professional intervention, recommending transport only if necessary. We offer the adolescent the opportunity to get help or consider the consequences if they don't. And, we guide parents through the often murky waters of getting the child into a treatment program.

Too often, families let denial, shame or embarrassment hold them back from getting the help they need. The fact is, even parents who do everything "right" when raising their kids cannot always prevent their child from being exposed to drugs or alcohol at school, friends' homes, parties and so on. Families need to know they did not create this problem, they cannot control it and they cannot cure it. What they can do is facilitate the opportunity for their child to learn the tools to living a substance-free life.

The bottom line: If your gut tells you something is not right with your child's behavior, trust it. Get the information and assistance you need to take action.

Nancy Knott, CADC-I, is also a board-registered interventionist. The Scripps McDonald Center at Scripps Memorial Hospital La Jolla offers free informational seminars on adolescent interventions every Tuesday at 7 p.m. For more information, please call 1-800-382-4357.

San Diego REPeritory Theatre presents the gripping, award-winning drama 'Doubt: A Parable'

San Diego REPeritory Theatre presents the gripping, award-winning drama "Doubt: A Parable." Performances begin Jan. 10 and continue through Feb. 8, 2009 at The Lyceum Theatre

Since its groundbreaking premiere in 2005, this critically acclaimed play has been showered with some of the country's most prestigious awards, including The Pulitzer Prize, 4 Tonys® and the NY Drama Critics Award for Best Play.

Ticket prices: single tickets \$25 - \$53; active military and senior discounts available. Student tickets are \$18. Tickets can be purchased at the REP's box office, 79 Horton Plaza in San Diego, by calling (619) 544-1000 or online at www.sdrep.org.

The Birds, The Bees and Blended Families

Keeping love alive

My husband and I have been married for two years. We both have two children from a previous marriage. We all got along so well during our courtship and first year of marriage. I suppose we were busy carefully adjusting to each other. My husband and I are noticing that we are slipping into some of the same negative patterns that we had in our last relationships. We seem to be feeling angry and distant with each other alot. Is this to be expected? Do all marriages have rough patches and then come back together again?

Worried in second marriage



Diana Weiss-Wisdom, Ph.D.

Dear Worried,

Yes, most marriages have their rough patches from time to time. And as you know, being in a blended family brings in a bunch of extra challenges. It can help to see these rough patches as opportunities to grow and learn more about each other. The old negative patterns emerging between you and your husband probably stem from unmet emotional needs. When couples are defensive with each other it creates an emotional disconnect. Feeling safe and understood, being able to be emotionally intimate, is what keeps romantic love alive.

Clinician and researcher, Dr. Sue Johnson developed the "Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy" (the American Psychological Association has recognized EFT as an empirically proven form of couples therapy). In her book, "Hold me Tight, Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love," Dr. Johnson asserts, "romantic love is all about attachment and emotional bonding. It is all about our wired in need to have someone to depend on — a loved one who can offer reliable emotional connection and comfort."

When you and your husband find yourself in that negative pattern, try to stop and identify the destructive dance between you. If you can simply recognize it together and notice that "we are doing it again." Neither of you is the enemy or problem, it is the way you are relating to each other. Once you do that, you can set it aside and focus on discussing the real feelings that you are having in a given moment.

The specific issues are usually less important than the way you go about handling them. Arguing in and of it self isn't bad, it's better than withdrawing and stonewalling. But ideally, the dialogue is not emotionally damaging or alienating.

Painful moments in love relationships can illuminate areas of our self that need more awareness. For example, I know a blended family where both people have children from a previous marriage. Their most challenging moments are around interactions with the children. The mom finds the stepdad too critical of her son; He thinks that they are defaulting on their parenting responsibilities by not expecting more from his stepson. When the mother defends her son against the stepfather (even in private), it can cause emotional alienation. When this couple is able to discuss their feelings about this issue, the mother sees that her husband is coming from a loving place; this helps her be more open to his perspective. He realizes that his unspoken hurt feelings are expressed through irritation in his tone, which only exacerbates the situation. He also learns that his wife feels guilty about the divorce and is afraid to cause the kids any additional stress. She recognizes how her fear and guilt is creating new problems rather than preventing them. So, you can see how stepping out of the defensive destructive dance, constructive and connecting communication is enabled to happen.

Just as children have attachment and security needs, so do adults. Research on relationships reveals that what repairs and makes love flourish is creating a safe and secure emotional connection.

Dr. Diana Weiss-Wisdom, Ph.D. (psy#12476) is a Licensed Psychologist in private practice. My new office is located near the intersection of Carmel Valley Road and Rancho Santa Fe Farms Road. (858) 259-0146 www.dradianaweiss-wisdom.com

SDSU hosts 25th Annual Writers' Conference on Feb. 6-8

As SDSU's College of Extended Studies prepares to host the 25th annual SDSU Writers' Conference on Feb. 6-8, there are numerous success stories to celebrate.

Advance registration is now available for the 2009 SDSU Writers' Conference. The fee to attend the conference is \$365 through Jan. 7 and \$399 after Jan. 7. Each conference participant may schedule up to three consultations.

The conference features advance reading appointments, where participants meet one-on-one with an editor to go over the opening pages of their manuscript.

The advance reading appointment fee, which is \$40, must be received with your appointment form and your work no later than Jan. Advance reading appointments are not accepted after Jan. 1.

"No other conference gives you as many opportunities to meet so many top editors and agents in one weekend. It's an incredible way to jumpstart your career," said Grady, author of *Whispers, Echoes, and Web of Smoke*.

For more information on the SDSU Writers' Conference, call (619) 594-2517 or visit www.neverstoplearning.net/writers/

San Diego Self Storage hosts Holiday Toy Drive



Toys for Tots US Marine with San Diego Self Storage Manager, Harry Klock.

San Diego Self Storage is sponsoring its annual holiday toy drive benefiting Toys for Tots by collecting toys at each of their 18 locations throughout the greater San Diego area. The US Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots program delivers new toys at Christmas, with the purpose of delivering a message of hope to needy youngsters that will motivate them to grow into responsible, productive, patriotic citizens and community leaders (www.toysfortots.org). During the toy drive, San Diego Self Storage will also be conducting raffles for a \$100 credit toward a tenant's storage rental; to enter the raffle, simply sign up when dropping off a new, unwrapped toy. The collection ends at 6 p.m. on Dec. 19 and the drawings will be held on Dec. 20.

San Diego Self Storage facilities are located in the following communities: Carlsbad; Carmel Valley; East Lake; Encinitas; Golden Triangle; Jamacha Point; La Jolla; Mira Mesa; National City; North County (Escondido); Olivenhain; Otay Crossing; Otay Mesa; Poway; Solana Beach; Sorrento Mesa and Sorrento Valley. Physical addresses and hours of operation can be located at www.sandiegostorage.com. According to Managing Member Tony Carr, "This is our 10th annual Toys for Tots toy drive and we are proud to sponsor this effort on behalf of the underprivileged children within the communities we serve; we collected over 6,500 toys in 2007 and this year we hope to exceed that. This program provides a meaningful opportunity for families to support a worthy cause by visiting one of our facilities during the holiday shopping season and dropping off a toy in between gathering gifts for friends and family. Our network of neighborhood self storage facilities makes it convenient for all San Diegans to get involved."

Founded in 1972, San Diego Self Storage is one of the largest self-storage providers in San Diego County with a network of 18 neighborhood self-storage facilities and additional facilities in Los Angeles and Orange County. The San Diego Business Journal recently ranked the company as the #1 Self Storage Operator in San Diego County. The company is locally owned and operated and offers small personal units and multiple larger units for commercial accounts. For further information, please call (858) 909-0090 or visit www.sandiegostorage.com.