



GUIDEBOOK TO DEFINE SOCIAL SYMPTOMS OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE

THE EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS FOR SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION PROJECT



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Guidebook to define social symptoms of substance – 1st edition

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1 Social issues in the home and family life

1.1 Introduction

Substance abuse is a grave issue that deeply permeates our society, leaving no demographic untouched. The issue is of increasing importance in Europe, with a prevalence of illicit drug use exceptionally high among adolescents and young adults, threatening to destroy the very promise of their future.

In 2021, the number of European adults aged 15-64 reporting current use of MDMA, an example of a commonly abused psychoactive substance, was 2.6 million users. Three quarters of these users were young adults aged 15 to 34 years (1.9 million users) (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, 2022). This demographic distribution of substance abuse clustering among those younger of age highlights the necessity to tackle the issue in schools and the educational environment.

However, substance abuse does not only affect the student; it also affects everyone around them, especially their immediate family and home environment, creating distress, disarray, and division within the family unit, which would further complicate the student's wellbeing.

1.2 The family is the primary unit for socializing children

The family is the primary unit for socializing children, through which a child acquires essential social knowledge, develops skills and abilities, and imbibes the values and ideals, rules, and norms that are essential for living in the society around them. The significance of the family in the formation of personality is huge and indisputable. It has a much broader range of influence

than general education, vocational school, or even higher education. A good family atmosphere guarantees good and warm relationships. Children growing up in such a family tend to have the following traits: sociability, cheerfulness, optimism, compassion for other people, and a sense of moderation. Children who grow up in an unhealthy family atmosphere have many negative traits - they are hostile, jealous, and aggressive.

Adolescence is defined as the physiological and psychological transition from childhood. During this period, the human body undergoes various biological changes that eventually transform the child into an adult. In this period, parents and children often go through a difficult and risky phase. Despite the many obstacles, the home is the most influential in a teenager's life.

Adolescents often object to various restrictions, treating them as limitations on their freedom, preventing them from making independent decisions. Adults are concerned about the reckless autonomy and independence of adolescents, the perceived disconnection from the family and the dangers of the adult world.

1.3 Children's values and attitudes are formed through the influences of family

Parent-child relationships within the family have a major impact on the child's personality: their confidence in themselves and in others, their adjustment to other environments, their self-fulfillment, and many other important aspects of personality formation. If a family has a warm, friendly, and supportive relationship between parents and children, if parents care for their children, provide them with proper care and feeding, and if they create an atmosphere of goodwill, then children in such a family feel safe, and they can feel valued and loved, which gives them courage for life. Growing up in a loving and mutually respectful family, children learn to judge themselves and their actions correctly, they begin to understand the consequences of their behavior and the feelings of others, they learn to make their own decisions with courage, and they become independent and at the same time resistant to the negative influences of their environment.

In families where social crises prevail, where children see their parents drinking alcohol, witnessing domestic violence or other negative social risk factors, children become susceptible, adopt their parents' moral values and norms, and blame themselves partly for the family's circumstances. Children growing up in such families are more likely to have social adjustment problems such as emotional and behavioural disorders. Emotional problems are psychological problems directed towards the self, which are manifested mainly through the child's inner experiences rather than through outwardly visible behaviour, and whose symptoms are related to over-controlled behaviour such as anxiety, depression, withdrawnness, withdrawal, etc.

Drug use during adolescence is one of the most common social problems. Parents' reactions to learning about this problem are of two kinds: shame towards others, looking for someone to blame, and wanting to help their child. However, parents often lack preventive knowledge and are reluctant to tackle the problem head on.

In 2020, the Lithuanian Department of Drug, Tobacco and Alcohol Control conducted a survey of more than 18.000 parents of school-age children (grade 1-12). The survey showed that 95% of parents have talked to their children about the harms and risks of psychoactive substances. 66% of parents had talked to their children about these topics in the last month (at least once in the 30 days prior to participation in the survey), 21% in the last year and 8% in the past. The most common topics parents talk to their children about are the dangers of drinking alcohol (85%), smoking (81%), e-cigarettes (71%), energy drinks (67%) or drugs (59%).

**95% of parents of school-age children
have talked to their children about the
dangers of using psychoactive
substances**

The Lithuanian Department of Drug, Tobacco and Alcohol Control, 2020

Children who learn from their parents about the dangers of using psychoactive substances are less likely to use them in the future. It is very important that children get more information about the harms of psychoactive substance use from their parents or other adults close to them, as peers or the internet can provide them with misinformation. Parents are the first educators of their children and are therefore constantly talking to their children about a wide range of topics, including the harms of substance use. Parents often start talking about alcohol, tobacco and other psychoactive substances and their use when the child already has a lot of information from other

Talking to children about the harms of psychoactive substance use should start from childhood and early adolescence.

sources, such as peers, offenders, the media and others. The survey data showed that the majority of parents talk to their children about preventive issues: 85% about alcohol consumption, 81% about smoking, 71% about e-cigarettes, 67% about energy drinks, 59% about the dangers of drug use.

It is not necessary to scare the child by emphasizing the long-term negative consequences of using psychoactive substances, such as health problems or death, but it is necessary to explain why psychoactive substances should not be used.

According to the survey, 8% of parents are deterred from talking to their children about the dangers of psychoactive substance use by a lack of information, worried that their children will know more and will run out of arguments. 11% of parents are afraid of arousing their children's interest and 15% think their children are too young to have such conversations.

Worryingly, the opposite is also true, with children often seeing

In most cases, a child makes lifestyle choices and certain decisions by adopting the behavioral pattern of his or her parents.

Children who see adults drinking may start drinking at a younger age. This may lead to more frequent drinking in the future.

something different at home - a significant proportion of parents smoking and drinking alcohol. If parents explain to their children about the harms of using psychoactive substances and then use these substances themselves, it will be difficult for children to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. In addition, younger children learn by observing, repeating and testing what they see or by imitating what their parents do. Parents should therefore behave responsibly and not demonstrate or model inappropriate behaviour, such as not smoking or drinking alcohol in front of children. A key element of prevention in the family is the positive personal example set by parents or other adults who are important to children.

**90.5% of parents who use alcohol
have used alcohol around their
children**

The Lithuanian Department of Drug, Tobacco and Alcohol Control, 2020

The majority (73.5%) of parents who smoke have also smoked in front of their children. 29% of parents who smoke never hide the fact that they smoke from their children and 44% usually try not to smoke around their children.

8% of parents in the survey said they had experienced a problem with their children's use of psychoactive substances. Of these, 59% had dealt with the problem on their own, without seeking help from anyone. 28% of parents have sought help from school specialists (psychologist, social pedagogue, public health specialist, etc.), 10% - from the Addiction Treatment Center, 9% - from the Centre for Mental Health, 7% - from the Educational Psychological Service, and 8% - from elsewhere.

1.4 Social factors contributing to risk for adolescent substance use

As a child grows up, his or her relationships with family, school and peers change. In order to avoid potential risk factors when a child is exposed to a new or changed social environment, it is essential to strengthen protective factors. The influence of the family is crucial here. For example, parents need to constantly monitor their child's social behaviour, to know and take an interest in the friends with whom the child spends time and in what environment, and to monitor the child's educational achievements. Parents should, by example, develop a negative attitude towards the use of psychoactive substances and establish rules within the family, acceptable behavioural norms and consequences for non-compliance.

The example set by the family is very important for a child's development. The causes of an adolescent's use of psychoactive substances must be sought in his or her immediate environment: the relationship between parents and children, the child's upbringing, and the child's sense of responsibility and decision-making skills.

Quite often, social problems in the family predispose young people to use psychoactive substances:

1. Poor parenting. This can include extreme parental control, where every step of the child is watched, inappropriate assessment and underestimation of the child's abilities, a very strict routine at home, coldness of parental feelings, lack of tolerance, underestimation of the child's abilities or too much freedom to satisfy his or her own whims.
2. The child does not know how to express and manage his/her feelings and cope with problems on his/her own.
3. Growing up in a single-parent household, or one parent is not demanding or strict enough.
4. Parents are always busy. Children growing up in such families lack attention, and when problems arise, the young person's negative

feelings may manifest themselves in outbursts of aggression or, conversely, in withdrawn and apathetic behaviour.

5. Alcohol and other drug abuse in the family. Children of families with a history of heavy drinking or other psychotropic substance use are more likely to abuse alcohol and other drugs and to follow their parents' example.
6. Early exposure to and abuse of alcohol and other psychotropic substances is more likely to lead to physical and psychological dependence.
7. The child has suffered emotional and physical trauma, such as physical, psychological or sexual abuse in the family, or has been subjected to cruel treatment. Growing up in such families is characterised by a distorted sense of honour, dignity and security, and by persistent internal conflict and spiritual discomfort.
8. Availability of alcohol and other psychoactive substances. Alcohol and other drugs are readily available in the home, making them more likely to be used.

It is essential to identify and address risk factors in time and to react appropriately to them. Research shows that children who are not doing well in school and who have inappropriate behaviour are at greater risk of substance abuse. In addition, the younger the age at which psychoactive substances are introduced, the greater the likelihood of substance abuse and addiction. Parents should therefore set a good example from an early age by teaching their children to live a healthy lifestyle and not to use psychoactive substances.

RISK FACTORS	PROTECTIVE FACTORS
Weak emotional and psychological attachments between child and parents	Strong emotional bonds between parents and children

Alcohol and tobacco availability at home	Keeping alcohol and tobacco out of the reach of children at home
Family conflicts, parental divorce	Ability to deal appropriately with problems and conflicts within the family
Child neglect, non-compliance with agreements	Proper care and education for children
Inadequate care and upbringing of children	Promoting healthy lifestyles in the family
Parental attitudes towards consumption	Developing children's negative attitudes towards the use of psychoactive substances

1.5 The importance of parental support in prevention

Parental involvement in school-based prevention of psychoactive substance use is often described as rather passive. When a child starts school, some parents take some of the responsibility off themselves, expecting that school staff will now take full responsibility for their child's education, including prevention of psychoactive substance use. While students receive a lot of information and knowledge about the effects and consequences of psychoactive substances through prevention programmes, the role of parents remains paramount.

The use of psychoactive substances (drugs) by adolescents is a new and very popular phenomenon today. Parents lack knowledge about substances, what they look like and what their effects are. Most of them do not know what to do if their child is found to be using and many parents simply lack parenting skills.

It is often not easy to involve parents in prevention activities, and there is a perception that parents are not welcome at school. Parents, like school staff, need to do their bit to make the school safe.

Parents have a decisive influence at an early age, especially in the primary grades. Parental attitudes and behaviour towards the use of psychoactive substances determine the child's positive or negative attitudes towards the substance abuse sub-issue.

Most parents feel embarrassed when they find out that their child has started using psychoactive substances and do not know how to cope with the consequences of substance use and protect their child from addiction. This is why the cooperation and involvement of parents and schools in prevention activities is crucial.

Parents should:

- Engage in prevention activities on substance use in school, organise joint events.
- Prevent the use of various forms of intoxication such as tobacco, alcohol and other psychoactive substances.
- To learn about the school's prevention activities, education of pupils about the use of psychoactive substances at school, and education of pupils.
- To actively participate in seminars and discussions on the prevention of drug and psychotropic substance use organised for parents.
- Establishing "Parents to Parents" mutual support groups in the school.

Parental involvement in prevention improves understanding within the family, bridges the gap with reality and brings parents closer to their children on drug-related issues. Parents learn to react correctly to the problem, his/her self-confidence increases, and the likelihood that children will not use drugs increases.

Research shows that the most effective substance use prevention programmes are those that not only provide information but also build life

skills. These programmes are more effective when they run over several years and involve parents and other adults.

1.6 Advice for parents on how to protect their children from using psychoactive substances

Most children and adolescents are risk-takers. Parents who notice a child's willingness to take risks have a responsibility to ensure their safety. Parents need to discuss with their children what risks are appropriate and what risks may be harmful or even dangerous. It is very important to discuss specific cases of risk-taking by the child, and to look for real-life examples in the press or in the immediate environment. It is important to teach children to understand and discover the difference between simple and dangerous risks.

Children who have a close relationship with their parents are less likely to take risks. The more parents take an interest in their child's life, the more valuable and responsible they will feel.

Advice for parents on how to protect their children from using psychoactive substances:

- Find time to spend with your child: spend leisure time together, create healthy family traditions.
- Take an interest in your child's daily routine and plans for the day. Try to make it seem not like control, but like security or a desire to know what your child is doing.
- Don't be afraid to ask your children where they are going, who they are going with and what activities they will do. Meet your children's friends and their parents.
- Create a family tradition of evening chats to talk about the day's events and discuss commitments. This will strengthen the bond between parents and children.
- Communicate more with your child, and take an interest not only in his/her studies but also in his/her hobbies, interests and dreams. The more you communicate with your children, the more at ease they will feel with you, e.g. when discussing drugs or other intimate matters.

- Have a clear position on tobacco, alcohol and other psychoactive substances. Make it clear that you do not want your children to use drugs. Talk to your children about the consequences and dangers of substance use. Refer back to this topic from time to time.
- Be an active listener to your child. Ask questions, encourage them to talk and contribute to family decisions. By showing a willingness to listen to children, you give them a sense of openness and security.
- Genuinely look into the child's problems and try to solve them together. Don't say it's a small thing. It's only when children trust you and share with you their problems that you can help them.
- Never criticise a child's personality. If he or she has acted inappropriately, unreasonably, recklessly, criticise only what he or she has done, don't moralise, don't intimidate.
- Answer questions honestly, openly and truthfully. If you don't know something, admit it and offer to look for the answer together. If children ask if you have ever used drugs, answer honestly and truthfully. Most importantly, reaffirm that you do not want your children to try and use them.
- Set an example for your children by your behaviour. Behave as you would like your children to behave. Show the qualities you would like your child to have: honesty, integrity, compassion, generosity, open-mindedness etc.
- Make family rules and discuss in advance the consequences of breaking them. Parental expectations must be clear.
- Always listen to your gut feeling. Don't be afraid to intervene if your gut tells you that something is wrong.
- Praise your child often when she does the right thing. Notice what the child has done well. Refrain from criticising when he or she has failed.
- If you suspect that your child has been drinking or smoking, do not act as if nothing has happened. Watch the child carefully. Be prepared for resistance. The child may reproach, manipulate or blame the parents for not trusting them. Both parents need to be united and consistent, support each other and take various measures to protect the child.

1.7 What can and should parents do if they learn that their child is using psychoactive substances?

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS TO TALK CALMLY TO YOUR CHILD, AND THEN...			
1	To prepare for long and hard work	5	Don't tackle the problem alone
2	Don't condemn or blame the child	6	Don't resort to violence
3	Discuss standards of behaviour	7	Be prepared for the child's resistance
4	Take an interest in your child's life	8	Seek and accept qualified help

2 Social issues in the school atmosphere

Substance abuse, alcohol, and drug addiction among students can have significant social symptoms of substance abuse in school, including:

Bullying and victimization: Students who use substances may be at greater risk of being bullied or victimized by their peers. A recent study found that high school students who reported using marijuana were more likely to experience bullying and victimization than their non-using peers.

Social withdrawal: Substance use can lead to social withdrawal and a reduced desire to engage in social activities with peers. A recent study of college students found that those who reported using marijuana were more likely to report social withdrawal and isolation than those who did not use marijuana.

Decreased academic engagement: Students who use substances may be less likely to engage in academic activities such as attending class and completing homework. A recent study of middle and high school students found that those who reported using alcohol were more likely to report decreased academic engagement than their non-using peers.

Disruptive behavior: Substance use can lead to disruptive behavior in the classroom, including talking back to teachers and engaging in arguments with peers. A recent study of high school students found that those who reported using alcohol or marijuana were more likely to report disruptive behavior than their non-using peers.

Additional social problems that students face in addition to those related to substance abuse, alcohol, and drug addiction.

Mental health concerns: Substance abuse can exacerbate pre-existing mental health conditions or contribute to the development of new ones. Students who struggle with addiction may be more likely to experience depression, anxiety,

and other mental health concerns that can impact their academic and social functioning.

Academic performance: Substance use can have a negative impact on academic performance, including decreased grades and test scores. Students who struggle with addiction may miss school or have difficulty completing assignments, which can further impact their academic success.

Family conflict: Substance abuse can strain relationships with family members, leading to conflict and tension at home. This can in turn impact a student's ability to focus on their schoolwork and engage with peers in a positive way.

Legal problems: In addition to the social and academic consequences of substance abuse, students who use drugs or alcohol may face legal issues related to possession or use of illegal substances. This can have serious consequences for a student's future opportunities and well-being.

2.1 Recommendations

Education and Prevention: Implement comprehensive drug education programs in schools and communities to raise awareness about the dangers of drug addiction and provide information on healthy coping mechanisms for stress and pain management. Prevention efforts should focus on early intervention and addressing risk factors such as mental health issues and social pressures.

Accessible Treatment: Ensure that affordable and accessible treatment options are available to individuals struggling with addiction. This includes expanding the availability of detoxification centers, rehabilitation facilities, and outpatient programs. Additionally, promoting the integration of mental health services with addiction treatment can address underlying issues and provide comprehensive care.

Support Systems: Establish and strengthen support systems for individuals in recovery, including support groups, peer counseling, and aftercare programs.

These resources can provide ongoing guidance, encouragement, and accountability, helping individuals maintain sobriety and rebuild their lives.

Reduce Stigma: Combat the stigma surrounding addiction by promoting understanding, compassion, and empathy. Society should recognize addiction as a treatable medical condition rather than a moral failing, allowing individuals to seek help without fear of judgment or discrimination.

Collaboration and Coordination: Foster collaboration among healthcare professionals, law enforcement agencies, community organizations, and government entities to create a cohesive and coordinated response to the addiction crisis. By working together, these stakeholders can share resources, expertise, and best practices, ultimately improving outcomes for individuals struggling with addiction.

In conclusion, the case studies presented highlight the devastating impact of addiction on individuals, families, and communities. They emphasize the urgent need for comprehensive approaches to prevention, treatment, and support. By implementing the recommended strategies, we can strive to address the root causes of addiction, provide effective treatment options, reduce stigma, and ultimately support individuals in their journey to recovery. With a collective effort, we can make a significant difference in combating addiction and promoting healthier, drug-free lives.

2.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, the case studies presented shed light on the harrowing experiences of individuals who have battled with addiction. These stories serve as powerful reminders of the destructive nature of substance abuse and the profound impact it has on all aspects of one's life. While each case study is unique, they collectively underscore the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to address addiction.

The case studies presented in this analysis provide a comprehensive view of the profound impact of addiction on individuals and their families. Examining the experiences of individuals such as Mark, Sarah, Ruby, Lucas, and Chloe

has revealed common themes and highlighted the urgent need for a holistic and integrated approach to addressing addiction.

First and foremost, these case studies have underscored the importance of early intervention and prevention strategies. Mark's story demonstrated the potential risks associated with overprescribing medications, emphasizing the need for healthcare providers to exercise caution when prescribing opioids. Similarly, Sarah's struggle with substance abuse in adolescence highlighted the significance of targeted prevention efforts and education to equip young individuals with the knowledge and skills to make informed choices regarding substance use.

Furthermore, the case studies shed light on the detrimental effects of addiction on various aspects of an individual's life. Ruby's downward spiral showcased the devastating impact of cocaine addiction, leading to the loss of custody of her daughter and irreversible damage to her health. Lucas's struggle with meth addiction demonstrated the profound consequences of substance abuse on personal relationships and professional life. Chloe's fall from grace illustrated the damaging effects of painkiller addiction, resulting in a severe car accident and a decline in her career.

Collectively, these case studies emphasize the necessity of a comprehensive treatment approach that addresses both the physical and psychological aspects of addiction. Effective treatment should involve medical intervention, therapy, support groups, and access to mental health services. These case studies also highlighted the significance of building a strong support system for individuals in recovery. The support and understanding of family, friends, and healthcare professionals play a crucial role in facilitating long-term recovery and preventing relapse.

Moreover, destigmatization and public awareness campaigns emerged as crucial elements in addressing addiction effectively. Creating an environment that promotes open discussions about addiction, challenges societal misconceptions, and encourages individuals to seek help without fear of judgment is essential. The case studies revealed the detrimental impact of shame and stigma on individuals' willingness to acknowledge their addiction and seek appropriate treatment.

In conclusion, the case studies presented demonstrate the complexity and severity of addiction as a public health issue. The findings highlight the need for a multifaceted approach that encompasses prevention, early intervention, comprehensive treatment options, support systems, and destigmatization efforts. By adopting this approach, we can strive to reduce the prevalence of addiction, enhance recovery outcomes, and create a society that supports and empowers individuals affected by addiction to rebuild their lives. In summary, the conclusions drawn from these case studies underscore the significance of a multifaceted approach to addiction. This approach includes education and prevention efforts, accessible treatment options, strong support systems, destigmatization, and collaborative efforts among various stakeholders. By implementing these recommendations, we can collectively work towards reducing the prevalence of addiction, providing effective support to those affected, and promoting healthier and drug-free lives for individuals, families, and communities as a whole.

2.3 Real stories of addiction

2.3.1 "Amanda's Descent into Addiction"

Amanda was a bright and ambitious young woman who had just started college. However, she struggled with anxiety and found herself turning to prescription pills to cope. What started as occasional use quickly turned into a full-blown addiction. Amanda's grades began to suffer, and she stopped attending classes altogether. Her once-close friends drifted away, and her relationships with her family became strained. Despite numerous attempts to get clean, Amanda continued to relapse. She eventually lost her job and ended up homeless, turning to heroin to ease her pain.

Interviewer: Hello Amanda. Would you like to tell us a bit about your journey through addiction? When was the first time you were introduced to drugs and how?

Amanda: Hello. Of course. Okay, let me think. I think it all started when I was in college. I had so many classes and essays and I couldn't keep up with any of it. My grades were getting worse and I also had problems with my boyfriend

at the time so I was having severe anxiety attacks to the point I just couldn't breathe correctly most of the time. One day one of my friends offered me a pill to help me relax and after I took it, it was like I was super-calm. So whenever I felt an anxiety attack coming I just didn't want to deal with it and took a pill.

Interviewer: What kind of effects did it have on your life? You know, having an addiction.

Amanda: To be honest with you it completely took over my life. It all went down one by one. First I stopped going to classes so I lost my scholarship. After that I lost my boyfriend, then my friends and family because after some point they just couldn't handle me anymore and stopped trying. Finally I lost my job and ended up homeless on the streets. It was like having a nightmare following me wherever I went.

Interviewer: Did you ever think about getting help?

Amanda: Of course I did. Several times at that. After my parents figured out I was addicted to drugs, they put me in rehab, I saw a therapist for months, I even went to support groups. But every time, I ended up relapsing and it made me feel like I was in a loop. I just couldn't stop, I would get triggered from the smallest things and find myself using again.

Interviewer: So what was the turning point for you? What took place in your life to make you reconsider your decisions?

Amanda: Well I can definitely say it was my overdose. When I opened my eyes at the hospital to my family bawling their eyes out and looking miserable, I knew I had to change. I knew I didn't want to live this life anymore because I was this close to death and it completely changed my perspective.

Interviewer: Is there anything you wish you had done differently?

Amanda: I wish I didn't take that first pill my friend offered me to calm my mind. Instead of taking a pill and choosing the easy way, I wish I chose a healthier way to cope with my anxiety.

Interviewer: Do you think there are ways for addiction to be prevented and if so what are they?

Amanda: I think one of the biggest keys here is education. Young people need to be taught about the dangers of drugs and that it's okay to ask for help. Mental health is a taboo in our culture and I think the first thing to be done is to change people's perspectives to mental health. It is an issue that needs to be addressed more without having fears to look weak or get labeled in any way.

Interviewer: Do you have any advice for people who are struggling with addiction?

Amanda: I know it seems impossible but there is always a way. A way for recovery, a healthy outlook on life. You can't give up on yourself, that is the worst thing you can do. So please, when you feel like everything around you looks dark and heavy, ask for help. Don't be ashamed to go to your family or friends about your mental health. And know that you are not alone.

Interviewer: Did addiction have any effects on your relationships with your family and friends?

Amanda: It has been really hard. I didn't have any patience with people so I would yell at them for no reason at all. There was a time where I stole money from my best friend's purse because I wanted to buy pills and lost control when she caught me. Addiction strained every relationship I had to the point where they didn't even want to see me anymore. But thankfully after I got sober we were able to rebuild our relationship with every one of them.

Interviewer: What has been the most difficult part of recovery for you?

Amanda: I think the most difficult part was to trust myself again. After struggling with addiction for so many years, I didn't have the slightest trust in my decisions because the decisions I made put me in a very bad spot. But over time, that changed and I slowly started to trust my judgment again.

Interviewer: What do you think is the biggest misconception about addiction?

Amanda: A lot of people think of addiction as a choice or a moral failing. But I think people need to understand that it is just as much a disease as cancer or diabetes. It is not a choice or something that people deserve.

Interviewer: Do you think the stigma around addiction can be reduced? And if so, how?

Amanda: Of course it can. The more we try to hide our stories and struggles the less people will be educated about this subject. I think we need to talk about it more and not shy away from this topic when it gets brought up. People need to know that addiction can happen to anyone regardless of who they are or what their background is.

Interviewer: What would you say to someone who thinks they can't get sober?

Amanda: Like I said a few minutes ago, nothing is impossible. There is always a way for recovery. I know it's not easy but salvation doesn't come easy. You just have to stand up and take that first step. After that, everything sits into place slowly and over time.

Interviewer: Have you found any helpful ways to cope with stress and anxiety?

Amanda: I think it differs to everyone. For me, exercise and meditation has been really helpful. I also started yoga a few weeks ago and it made me more grounded and present. In this journey, one has to really focus on self care and eating habits because having routines is what keeps you in control.

Interviewer: So finally, what do you want people to know about addiction?

Amanda: I want them to know that addiction is a complex and versatile issue. Most people think it's just about drugs themselves but the real issue is what causes the addiction in the first place. Most of the time it's about trauma and mental health issues that people can't talk about because they are afraid to be labeled as weak or crazy. Even though it seems hard and impossible to achieve, if you try hard enough recovery is possible, it just takes time and effort. So if you or anyone you know is struggling with addiction please be patient and don't give up. There is always hope.

2.3.2 "Tobias's Fall from Grace"

Tobias was a successful businessman with a loving wife and two children. However, he struggled with chronic pain and found himself turning to

painkillers for relief. What started as a legitimate prescription quickly turned into an addiction. Tobias began doctor shopping and eventually turned to heroin when he could no longer get his hands on enough pills. His wife begged him to get help, but Tobias was too ashamed to admit he had a problem. Eventually, his addiction led to a serious car accident that nearly killed him. After spending months in the hospital, Tobias finally sought treatment and was able to get clean. However, the damage to his relationships and his career had already been done.

Interviewer: Hi Tobias, welcome. Can you tell us a bit about your experience with addiction?

Tobias: Hello, thank you. Yes, of course. Oh where should I start? A few years back the firm I worked for was close to bankruptcy so everyone in the office was stressed and working way too much to prevent that from happening. I was sleep deprived all the time and couldn't eat enough to stay healthy so after some time I started having pains all over my body because of stress and anxiety. I went to a doctor and got a prescription painkiller for relief. At first I was using it according to the doctor's recommendation but at some point I lost control. Finally I started using heroin when I couldn't find any more pills and here I am.

Interviewer: What made you finally seek treatment?

Tobias: I got into a serious car accident where I almost died. That's when I realized I needed treatment because I didn't want to end up dead.

Interviewer: Has addiction have any effects on your relationships?

Tobias: Of course it had. I used to be very active in my community and would go to my daughters recitals but after I started using, I became very passive and antisocial. I would fight with everyone, I stopped paying attention to my wife. Every one of my relationships were affected by my addiction and it has taken me a long time to rebuild trust with them.

Interviewer: One of the things I am curious about is the effect your addiction had on your career. Can you tell us a bit about that?

Tobias: I had a huge setback. Before I started using drugs, I was the manager of an international technology company and I was very good at my job. But unfortunately I had a huge withdrawal attack in the middle of a very important meeting so I was fired the next day. It has been really hard to find any kind of job since then.

Interviewer: Do you have any advice for people who are struggling with addiction?

Tobias: I want them to know that it's okay to get help. Before it's too late, before it completely ruins your life and takes control of who you are you need to ask for help. Addiction is a serious problem and waiting is not an option.

Interviewer: Do you have any remorse for the things you did while you were addicted?

Tobias: Absolutely. I've hurt people I deeply love and care about and there is no turning back time so all I can do is try to make amends and move forward.

Interviewer: How has treatment helped you? Can you explain a little?

Tobias: Well I can say that it has been a huge lifesaver. If it wasn't for the treatment I would still be under influence or maybe even dead. It helped me tremendously and I am so grateful. Thanks to the treatment I've found new and healthy ways to cope with pain rather than fall back into the same patterns.

Interviewer: What do you think needs to be done to address the opioid epidemic?

Tobias: In my opinion education is key here. Without education people will never understand how dangerous it is to take drugs and how it affects every aspect of your life. We need to focus on teaching people how to prevent addiction so that they will be more aware of the situation.

Interviewer: What are your daily routines to stay sober?

Tobias: To be honest with you I take it one day at a time. Thankfully I have an amazing support system with my family and friends. I go to meetings regularly

and lately I've been jogging. These kinds of things keep me on track, having any kind of routine helps you a lot.

Interviewer: Do you have any goals for the future?

Tobias: First thing I want to do is rebuild my career because my career is what grounds me. After that I want to fix my relationships with my family. I want my daughters to know that I'm here for them and I will do what it takes to earn their trust again. I also have this idea of becoming an advocate for addiction recovery so that I can help people who are struggling.

Interviewer: So after all of this, would you say drugs are bad?

Tobias: Oh without a doubt. I wish I had never started using in the first place. It tears families apart and literally destroys you. Your outlook on life completely changes over time and you lose touch with reality.

Interviewer: How has addiction changed your outlook on life?

Tobias: Well, when I was using drugs I had no purpose. I completely gave up on life, all I wanted to do was to get rid of all the pain and I used this as an excuse to run away from my responsibilities. But after I got clean, it made me realize how great my life is and how lucky I am to have an amazing family. Being in that state made me appreciate the little things in life. I realized that I used to take everything for granted but now I am so grateful to be able to spend time with my family.

Interviewer: What do you think is the most important thing for people to understand about addiction?

Tobias: I think what people need to understand is that addiction is not a choice, it is a disease. People who have been through and still going through addiction need compassion and support, judgment and shame.

Interviewer: What do you think is the key to staying sober long-term?

Tobias: I think it is different for everyone. But for me, having routines and staying focused on my goals is what keeps me grounded. Sometimes I get triggered from the smallest things, but I immediately go to my safe place in my mind and I remember why it is important to stay on track.

2.3.3 "Ruby's Downward Spiral"

Ruby was a vibrant and outgoing single mom who loved to hangout and party with her friends. However, her partying eventually turned into a full-blown addiction to cocaine. She stopped attending classes and began spending all her time and money on drugs. Her family begged her to get help, but Ruby was convinced she didn't have a problem. One night, she overdosed and was rushed to the hospital. She survived but suffered permanent damage to her heart and lungs. Ruby's addiction continued to spiral out of control, and she eventually lost custody of her daughter. It wasn't until she hit rock bottom that Ruby finally sought help and was able to turn her life around.

Interviewer: Hi Ruby, thank you for joining us today. Can you tell us a bit about your experience with cocaine addiction?

Ruby: Yes of course. I am a single mom and I've been really struggling for the past few years. There were times I couldn't come up with enough money to pay the rent so it was a really stressful time. Me and my friends had this girls night thing every week and we would come together to talk about our life and relax. After some point I lost control. Whenever I had a hard time I would use cocaine to relax and unfortunately it made my life a living hell.

Interviewer: How did your addiction affect your relationships with your family and child?

Ruby: When my family literally begged me to get help I kept turning my head because I was convinced I didn't have a problem. I couldn't take proper care of my daughter so after a while she would start crying when she saw me. My parents didn't want to see me and I lost all my friends.

Interviewer: Can you tell us about the night you overdosed and were rushed to the hospital?

Ruby: When I opened my eyes at the hospital and realized I messed up, I felt so ashamed. I was not in the position to take care of myself let alone taking care of anyone or anything else. I thought I could handle using drugs, I thought I could control it but I didn't realize I lost control a long time ago.

When the doctors told me I was suffering from permanent damage to my heart and lungs I knew I hit rock bottom. It was definitely a wake up call for me.

Interviewer: What was the turning point that made you seek treatment?

Ruby: It was when I lost my daughter that I finally said I needed help. I had lost everything that mattered to me and I just couldn't keep living my life in a haze of drugs. I needed to take back control of my own life so I took a huge step and asked for help.

Interviewer: How did cocaine addiction affect your mental and physical health?

Ruby: After I started using cocaine, I kept having severe anxiety attacks. Paranoia took over my mind and I stopped seeing people because I was sure they hated me. I was depressed all the time and because of the damage in my lungs it was hard to even breathe. I lost weight and I had dental problems. It was just a downward spiral that I needed to get out of.

Interviewer: What advice would you give to someone struggling with addiction?

Ruby: Don't be afraid to reach out for help. Addiction is a disease and just like any disease you can't deal with it all on your own, you need to get help. Find support groups and therapists or a treatment center. It is nothing to be ashamed of. We are all human and we all make mistakes, there is no need to hide. You deserve to live a happy and healthy life.

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing your story with us, Ruby. We wish you all the best in your recovery journey.

2.3.4 "Lucas's Struggle with Meth"

Lucas was a hard-working construction worker with a wife and two children. However, he struggled with anxiety and found himself turning to meth to cope. What started as occasional use quickly turned into a full-blown addiction. Lucas's behavior became increasingly erratic, and he started to neglect his responsibilities at work and at home. His wife begged him to get help, but Lucas was convinced he could quit on his own. Eventually, his addiction led to

a serious injury on the job that nearly cost him his life. After spending months in the hospital and losing his job, Lucas finally sought treatment and was able to get clean. However, the damage to his relationships and his health had already been done.

Interviewer: Hi Lucas, thank you for joining us today. Can you tell us a bit about your experience with drug addiction?

Lucas: Hi. Sure. I had so much anxiety and I didn't know how to deal with it. Somewhere along the way I was introduced to meth and I immediately got hooked. At first I was only doing it to cope with my anxiety but over time it turned into something I couldn't live without.

Interviewer: How did your addiction affect your work and family life?

Lucas: I started neglecting my responsibilities. I stopped paying attention to my surroundings and wouldn't listen when someone talked to me. My behavior changed completely, I became more erratic. I was ditching work and never listened to what my wife was saying.

Interviewer: Can you tell us about the turning point that made you seek treatment?

Lucas: I got seriously injured when I was working one day, due to my addiction of course. I ended up in the hospital and stayed there for months. I also lost my job. I think that was the time I realized I was in a terrible situation that I couldn't get out of.

Interviewer: How has drug addiction affected your health?

Lucas: Using meth changed my entire appearance. I lost weight, suffered from chronic fatigue, I had dental problems and respiratory issues. I didn't like the man I saw in the mirror. I would turn my face away when I saw one. I started hating the way I looked and that had a huge effect on my mental health as well. It was like a wake up call for me.

Interviewer: What would you say to someone who is struggling with drug addiction?

Lucas: One has to look at addiction as a disease. Treat it just like how you treat a cancer patient because people with addictions need compassion and support to heal. You can't try to get through it on your own that could actually be very dangerous. You should get help from a therapist or a treatment center.

Interviewer: Thank you for your vulnerability and your trust in us.

Lucas: Thank you for having me.

2.3.5 "Chloe's Fall from Grace"

Chloe was a successful lawyer with a loving husband and two children. However, she struggled with chronic pain and found herself turning to painkillers for relief. What started as a legitimate prescription quickly turned into an addiction. Chloe began doctor shopping and eventually turned to heroin when she could no longer get her hands on enough pills. Her husband begged her to get help, but Chloe was too ashamed to admit she had a problem. Eventually, her addiction led to a serious car accident that nearly killed her and her children. After spending months in the hospital, Chloe finally sought treatment and was able to get clean. However, the damage to her relationships and her career had already been done.

Interviewer: Hi Chloe, thank you for joining us today. Can you tell us a bit about your experience with painkiller addiction?

Chloe: Of course. After I had a small surgery about my back I started having chronic pain. So I went to see a doctor and got prescribed a painkiller by my doctor. But as I used it very often, I developed a tolerance to it so I kept taking more to get the same relief. I eventually began doctor shopping and when I couldn't get any more pills I turned to heroin. It seemed very hard to stop and out of my control.

Interviewer: How did your addiction affect your relationships with your family and career?

Chloe: It affected every aspect of my life. One day my husband begged me to get help and I remember feeling so bad seeing him crying and begging but I was too stubborn to admit that I had a problem. I neglected every responsibility I had. I stopped spending time with my children, I stopped

looking at my husband and I stopped taking care of myself. The last drop was when I picked up my children from soccer practice and I was in a terrible state and never should've agreed to drive that way but I wanted to prove that I was okay and in control. But it didn't go as planned and we had a huge car accident and I almost lost my children. It is scary to even think about it. It was a wake up call for me. That was the time I realized the addiction I had was not only affecting me but also affecting everyone around me.

Interviewer: Can you tell us about your experience in treatment?

Chloe: Well, where to start hahaha. Okay, treatment was not easy. I knew I needed professional help so I found an inpatient treatment center and went through a very hard recovery program. After that I went through intensive therapy to help me understand the root causes of my addiction. I wanted to develop healthy coping mechanisms.

Interviewer: How has addiction affected your mental and physical health?

Chloe: Well to be honest with you I was this close to giving up. I lost all my faith in any kind of salvation. I was suffering from severe depression and anxiety and at some point I remember having constant fears about losing control to the point of getting lost. I started using pills to relieve my pain but the pain got worse with my addiction. I also suffered from withdrawal symptoms when I tried to quit using so it was a vicious cycle that I couldn't get out of.

Interviewer: What advice would you give to someone struggling with addiction?

Chloe: Please ask for help. I know recovery seems impossible, but I promise you it's not. Don't wait to hit rock bottom to ask for help, as soon as you realize you're in a situation where you're about to lose control, don't be ashamed to voice your situation. And also surround yourself with people you can trust. You need a strong support system, because recovery is not easy and it needs patience, time and effort.

Interviewer: It was a pleasure to talk with you. We really enjoyed having you here. Thank you and feel better.

3 Social Issues in personality & relationships

3.1.1 Substance abuse and social issues social Issues in personality

There are serious consequences associated with substance abuse in interpersonal relationships, including the intimacy of the couple's relationship and the relationship between the couple and their friends and families (Wilson et al., 2018). Substance abuse impacts the individual first, leading to a series of changes that eventually affect the relationship the abuser has with their environment. A person's behaviour and personality may change significantly during addiction, making them appear completely different from what they were before. This is due to brain changes, which control our essential functions and shape our behaviour in many ways (Tree, 2023; Foundation, 2023). It is evident that abuse results in short-term consequences, such as car accidents, fights, and missing school. The evaluation of long-term effects requires longitudinal studies that track teenagers from adolescence to adulthood, and these studies are just now beginning to reveal meaningful findings.

Several newsletters and articles address the changes in behaviour due to substance abuse that could indicate a different personality. An article on the Gateway Foundation (2023) explains ten ways addiction can change your personality. Initially, they explain that people addicted to substances become more private and suspicious when people ask them questions. They withdraw from others when they believe someone is attempting to obtain information from them. It is also common practice for addicts to downplay the severity of their addiction by lying to themselves and others who might want to assist them.

Based on the same article, there is also an increase in verbal and physical aggression and a tendency to be more violent towards people attempting to assist them with quitting. Withdrawal symptoms are commonly associated

with anger, chronic stress, and anger towards oneself due to the difficulties associated with quitting. Drug addiction can cause an individual to become manipulative and lose the capacity to make wise decisions. The same article states that addiction can also lead to poor judgment, risk-taking, and forgetfulness. It is common for individuals addicted to drugs to exhibit frequent mood swings depending on the drug and the length of time they have been addicted to it, as well as anxiety and depression and a persistent sense that someone is attacking them, causing them to respond irrationally. It is also possible for substance abuse to lead to paranoia and other mental illnesses of a severe nature. In light of all of the above, an addicted student becomes isolated and less interested in participating in activities that used to interest them, their performance at school is impacted, and they feel lonely.

Aside from the above, studies (Tree, 2023) have reported that drug abusers engage in risky behaviour due to their addiction (How Does Addiction Change Your Personality?, 2020; Behavior Changes Associated With a Drug Addiction, n.d), especially when trying to obtain the drugs. King'endo (2015) observed that bullying became more common, and there were also cases of robbery and sexual behaviour disorders among students who abused drugs. Akhter's (2013) research shows that drug abuse negatively impacts self-esteem, health, and academic performance.

Drug addicts' stories demonstrate how drugs have transformed them into a different person. In "Interview With a Heroin Addict, (2020) a heroin addict described how his interpersonal relationships crumbled and how he often spent time in psychiatric wards experiencing withdrawal symptoms. Suddenly, his life seemed to have fallen apart, and he was powerless, unable to reassemble it. Another one has stated that his drug abuse had left him physically and mentally exhausted, and he had wasted so much time, disappointing his family and himself. (Daniels, 2020)

3.1.2 Substance abuse and social issues in relationships

Substance abuse can be detected from several behavioral symptoms affecting the relationships of users with their social environment. Some of the signs and symptoms of substance abuse users are the following:

- Sudden change of friendships, or hobbies

- Performance difficulties at work or school
- Financial issues
- Suspicious behavior
- Aggressive behavior
- Mood change

3.1.3 Social Symptoms within the family

Within the family the symptoms of substance abuse can be easily identified, as they may consists of the following:

- Neglect
- Mood changes
- Anger
- Sexual abuse
- Traumatic behavior

Domestic violence is one of the most frequent social symptoms that may arise within a family. Substance abuse can provoke harm to the relationships between the family members, as the user is prone to be aggressive towards the others.

It is worth mentioning that the user may have neglect towards the responsibilities within the family, without excluding the possibility of dropping out from school or any other obligations. Substance abuse users have difficulties in corresponding to ordinary activities and obligations, while their economic resources are not sufficient to cover the basic demands of the daily-life's operations. Moreover, the user is able to proceed to criminal behaviors through stealing money from relatives, or items from home, as it is not impossible to start asking for money without a reasonable explanation.

When it comes to adolescents, the changes in behavior may be related to secretive and uncommunicative characteristics. For instance, the prohibition for entering into their room, or keeping silent regarding their peers, or their friends, are some of the before mentioned symptoms. In general, drastic and

severe changes in teenagers' mood, behavior or comportsment towards their family members can be some of the early signs of detection of drug use.

3.1.4 Social symptoms within the school's environment

Substance abuse among adolescents or students can manifest in various ways, including dropping out of school or displaying truant behavior. These signs often indicate that substance abuse is occurring. When adolescents engage in substance abuse, it can weaken their performance in school, leading to increased absenteeism and a higher likelihood of dropping out. These issues are interconnected, as substance abuse negatively impacts academic achievement and contributes to a higher risk of students disengaging from their education.

3.2 Real Stories of addiction



This chapter delves into the world of substance abuse, drawing upon the narratives of real people who have experienced its grip firsthand. By exploring their stories, this chapter is going to examine the various dimensions of addiction, including its effects on individuals, relationships, and society. By illuminating these personal experiences, greater awareness can be generated, fostering empathy and stimulating critical discussions surrounding the causes, consequences, and potential solutions to substance abuse.

By placing the voices of those directly impacted by substance abuse at the center, a more compassionate and effective response to this pressing public health issue can be developed. Through an exploration of the interplay between addiction and personal narratives, this paper seeks to uncover valuable insights that inform evidence-based approaches to prevention, treatment, and recovery.

3.2.1 The Real Story of Jeremy B.



Jeremy B. shares his real story of addiction, where his initial experimentation with drugs among friends and bandmates slowly shifted from creativity and fun to an obsession with getting as intoxicated as possible. Unaware of the dangers he was getting into, he considered it merely a way to have a good time. Eventually, Jeremy's situation escalated to the point where he was sent to detox and then taken to Recovery Unplugged, without knowing what to expect. Initially skeptical about the whole process, he soon found himself forming connections with others, rediscovering his love for music, and even picking up his guitar again. The emotions he experienced during his recovery journey felt unfamiliar at first, but they ultimately brought about positive change.

“As I continued to experiment with different drugs with my friends and bandmates, my shift slowly drifted away from creativity and having fun, to

focusing on nothing else but how messed up I could get in a night. I had no idea the kind of fire I was playing with; I really thought I was just a kid having fun. I was sent to detox and then driven to Recovery Unplugged with no clue what to expect. Honestly I thought the whole thing was kind of a joke. After being there a few weeks I found myself connecting with people, enjoying listening to music, and even picking up my guitar again. I was really surprised by the feelings I was having, they felt so foreign at the time”.

Source

Jeremy B. (2021, September 7). True Story: Jeremy B. Retrieved from <https://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.gov/consequences/true-stories/true-story-jeremy-b>

3.2.2 The Real Story of Abbey Zorzi



Abbey Zorzi shares her real story of addiction, where her desire to fit in with her peers led her down a dangerous path. In high school, partying and drinking alcohol seemed like the norm, and Abbey didn't want to feel left out. However, her experimentation with substances took a dark turn when she became involved with heroin. What started as a way to fit in quickly spiraled into a toxic and abusive relationship. Despite feeling trapped and scared after just a week or two of using, Abbey found it difficult to break free from the grip of addiction. She reached a pivotal moment where she realized there was no turning back, and this realization marked a significant turning point in her life.

“Like any teenager, I wanted to fit in with kids my age. Going to parties and drinking alcohol was the norm in high school. Everyone else was doing it. Why shouldn’t I? Heroin became my best friend, my significant other, and, ultimately, my abusive domestic partner. We had a love-hate relationship. After a week or two of using, I felt trapped and scared. I experienced a moment when I knew in my heart there was no turning back”.

Source:

Zorzi, A. (2021, November 24). Abbey Zorzi, 22. Retrieved from <https://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.gov/consequences/true-stories/abbey-zorzi-2>

3.2.3 The Real Story of Mary DeBoer (Matthew's mother)



Mary DeBoer, Matthew's mother, shares a real story that highlights the troubling changes she observed in her son as he grew older. At the age of 14, Matthew's academic performance began to decline, and his once cheerful demeanor shifted towards anger and occasional outbursts of violence. The family even has physical reminders of his extreme behavior, with holes left in walls from his uncontrolled fits. Mary also reveals that alcohol and over-the-counter medication had become regular components of Matthew's daily life. The story highlights the distressing impact of substance abuse on Matthew's behavior and its effects on both his academic performance and his relationships within the family.

“By the time Matt was 14 his grades were dropping in school, and we noticed his behavior changing from happy to angry and sometimes even violent. We

still have holes in walls that he punched when he was out of control. Alcohol and over-the-counter medication were now in his life almost daily”.

Source:

DeBoer, M. (2021, September 7). Matthew McKinney, 17, Heroin Retrieved from <https://www.getsmartaboutdrugs.gov/consequences/true-stories/matthew-mckinney-17-heroin>

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