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A Real Mom: Son is using again, "sadly unsurprising"

Real Mom
MinnMoms Columnist

"Sadly, unsurprising." A reader provided that succinct, spot-on response to the column a few weeks back. He has been sober for more than a decade and is now a treatment professional and one of my most trusted, admired advisors.

This wasn't a hopeless, negative summation, rather a realistic perspective from one who knows that the path forward is fraught with ups, downs and bumps. That two-word synopsis was all-knowing, all-telling and filled with compassion.

What a recovering addict understands better than anyone else is that recovery remains an on-and-off process until one day there is wholehearted readiness and willingness.

With my son's recent employment, he has achieved his first goal - a source of income. For him, the work schedule trumps the out-patient treatment schedule. He has not altogether abandoned treatment but is only going occasionally. This is a high-risk fork in the road because money in his pocket is a strong temptation that has derailed him time and time again.

It's not fun to be right

Over the past month, I could sense that he was smoking again. It was just a hunch without hard



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evidence, and then I smelled it - not the smell of marijuana, but the smell of hiding it.

When I picked him up last week to attend his little brother's orchestra concert, he was freshly showered and neatly dressed. He had doused himself with cologne and was chewing a wad of strongly flavored mint gum. I know those scents well from when he lived at

Advertisement

home and would come in from work, sports practice or being out with friends, and we could smell him from the other side of the room.

I asked directly if he's been using again. He admitted, after 60 days of sobriety, he's smoked weed three times in the past month. We aren't naïve to believe that three is the actual number of times. Like all users, he's prone to fabricate. My mom intuition, unfortunately, proves right once more.

He believes he can use in moderation. "Nothing crazy like before, Mom," he tells me.

Choosing to use is not the same as relapsing

For many addicts, relapse is an important, even integral, part of recovery. It's an opportunity to look at the triggers for using and a chance to recommit to a plan to choose a better response the next time. For my son, however, this wasn't a relapse. He didn't give in. He made a conscious decision. He, to this day, still tells us and his treatment team that he has no intention of giving up pot, that he wants to smoke and believes he can use in moderation.

The pendulum of casual use versus problematic use is not fair, but it is the reality more often than not that the choice of what kind of user we will be is not ours. When it comes to addiction, the only choice is to use or not use. There are no in-betweens. There is only a false sense of thinking you can handle it and denying its correlation with problems in your life.

I understand his belief, his promise that he won't revert back to being an all-day, every-day user. I also understand that that is an unlikely possibility. He could be the anomaly who bucks the trend - like a dieter who gives up dessert to lose weight and then figures out how to successfully have a treat once in a while. But this type of declaration is more likely a well-intentioned but hollow promise where words and actions diverge instead of aligning.

Role models are awesome

My author friend, Chad Hepler, whom I connected with last summer when our son first arrived at the wilderness program, is a role model for young-adult addiction. In his [recent book](#), he describes what transpired after completion of the treatment program: Eight months of sobriety followed by several years of out-of-control drinking and drugging including several arrests and jail time - all before he reached his mid-20s.

It took a series of increasingly worse consequences and a deteriorating family relationship before he was truly ready to turn his life around by committing to abstinence and recovery. Chad is now

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thriving and delivering his message to others as an addiction counselor - I am in awe!

Reading Chad's story reminded me of the importance of acceptance and truth. It provided me with hope. What I appreciate most is that he is just a few years older than my son, so the experiences, mindset and point of view are close to what I'm witnessing. That alone is reassuring (and at times disturbing) because it punctuates the complexity and duration that accompany addiction and recovery.



From current situation to desired situation

One day, I hope that readers - especially readers who see themselves here as recovering addicts or parents of addicts - will see my son's promises become real promises that are backed by positive choices (possible relapse), follow through, commitment and success. Then, we'll flip "sadly, unsurprising" into a comment of "happily, expected."

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