



EMPOWERING PARENTS TO RAISE
THEIR CHILDREN TO BE SUBSTANCE-FREE

Talk Early And Often About Alcohol, Tobacco And Other Drugs. Even When It Gets Tough

Know! Addiction Doesn't Play Favorites

Whitney Houston's sudden and tragic death will continue to be speculated and talked about by news media, and individuals, for weeks to come. Once the toxicology report is released, the subject is sure to reignite. More than likely, at one point or another, a conversation about Ms. Houston will emerge in your home. But parents beware; depending on how you discuss the issue of drug and alcohol addiction, you may be reinforcing attitudes and beliefs in your children, based on stereotypes, not facts.

Question: How do you think most people would describe a typical addict?

Common answers include: **Emotionally Weak - Can't Handle Stress - No Willpower - Uncaring - Immoral - Selfish.**

Would you agree that most people do in fact think it is "that kind of person" who is more likely to develop an alcohol or other drug addiction? If this is true, it should simply be a matter of adjusting who they are, right? If only they become stronger, display greater willpower, start caring more about the people in their lives than their drug of choice; then they should be able to beat their addiction, right? If only it were so easy.

Perhaps Whitney Houston was under that same misperception when, in reference to her personal struggles with alcohol, marijuana, cocaine and pills, she said, "The biggest devil is me." In that same interview she went on to say that in the past she chose to use these substances and that now she is simply choosing not to use. She claimed she was done with drugs. That was ten years ago. We know that prescription pills and alcohol were found in her hotel room where she recently died.

In reality, for a person addicted to alcohol or other drugs, the biggest devil is the drug itself. While "choices" absolutely lay the groundwork toward the path to addiction, recovery is about much more than willpower or the love of family. It is not a matter of strength versus weakness. Substance addiction is a disease resulting from changes in brain chemistry, which is powerful and consuming. Professional help is usually required to treat the disease and make permanent lifestyle changes.

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Talking regularly with kids about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs reduces their risk of using.

Know! urges you to encourage other parents to join Know!.

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Reality also reveals that addiction does not play favorites. There is no one person who can be defined as the stereotypical addict. A loving parent raising his/her children or a teenager with a seemingly bright future is at-risk, just like this Grammy award-winning celebrity.

The take-away message for parents: When the subject comes up, especially in the presence of young, impressionable children, be mindful of what you say and how you say it. Dispel the myth that addiction only happens to, "that kind of person." Youth need to know that it can happen to anyone, including them. Reinforce the importance of making good decisions and remind your child that one high-risk choice can change the course of everything. Speaking with empathy, not judgment, resonates more with young people and promotes open conversation, increasing your child's comfort level in talking with you about sensitive subjects like this and other drug-related topics.

Sources: [Diane Sawyer/Whitney Houston Interview, ABC, 2002](#). Prime for Life, Prevention Research Institute.