

Sex, Drugs and Rock 'n Roll: Part I - Sex

By Marvin W Berkowitz, PhD

This is part two of a three-part series of articles in which I revisit "Sex, Drugs and Rock 'n' Roll," the mantra of my adolescence. In the last column I discussed how to build character in children when talking about sex. Now it's on to drugs.

Most parents dread the possibility of having their kids become involved with drugs. Worse, recent research suggests that the fear is well justified. According to the [Monitoring the Future](#) study, more than half of twelfth graders in the U.S. have used an illegal drug at least once. Although that figure is the highest it has been since 1987 it doesn't include alcohol, which has been used by four out of every five high school seniors, or cigarettes, used by nearly two out of three seniors. Even more frightening is the number of children who have used drugs within the last 30 days: one in four for illegal drugs, one in three for cigarettes, and one in two for alcohol.

Where does parenting for character come into play in all this? To begin with, two of the biggest contributors to kids becoming involved with drugs are parents who use drugs themselves and parents who voice pro-drug attitudes and sentiments. If a kid has parents who smoke marijuana or use cocaine then unsurprisingly, that kid is considerably more likely to use drugs herself. And if parents joke about drug use, talk about how much fun they are, argue that drugs aren't dangerous, or condone their use by others, then again their children are more likely to become involved with drugs.

Fortunately, there are things parents can do to diminish their kids' likelihood of using drugs. Parents can buffer their kids against the temptation of drug use by promoting religion and spirituality in the family, by developing close and loving relationships with their kids, by staying actively involved in their kids' lives, and by expecting their kids to succeed in school and life in general. It's also important to keep the lines of communication open.

Talk to your child about drugs and life and worries and pressures and temptations. But also make sure you listen to what your child has to say on these topics because kids often try to conceal personal concerns. When your daughter says, "I'm worried that Jane may start using drugs because kids keep pressuring her," discuss her concern for Jane but be certain to also ask your daughter if she too is worried about using drugs and whether she also feels such pressures. Having learned that you remained calm while discussing Jane's problem, your daughter may well feel relaxed enough to deal with personal issues that were at the base of the discussion in the first place.

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We must remember that just because our own lives are more complicated and pressure-laden than are our children's, they are certainly not immune to feeling pressure. It's their experiences that matter more than our perception of their experiences. In other words, it's all about how it seems and feels to them.

Trying to turn a child's mountains into molehills doesn't work. What looks like a molehill to an adult often seems like Mt. Everest to a child. As that famous philosopher, Jiminy Cricket, once said, "Let your conscience be your guide." Well, when you're mountain climbing it's a good idea to take along a guide. Volunteer to be your children's guide in order to help them climb that mountain known as life.

Doing so will help build both your child's conscience and her character.