

## CHAPTER 27

# Smoking, Drinking and Drugs

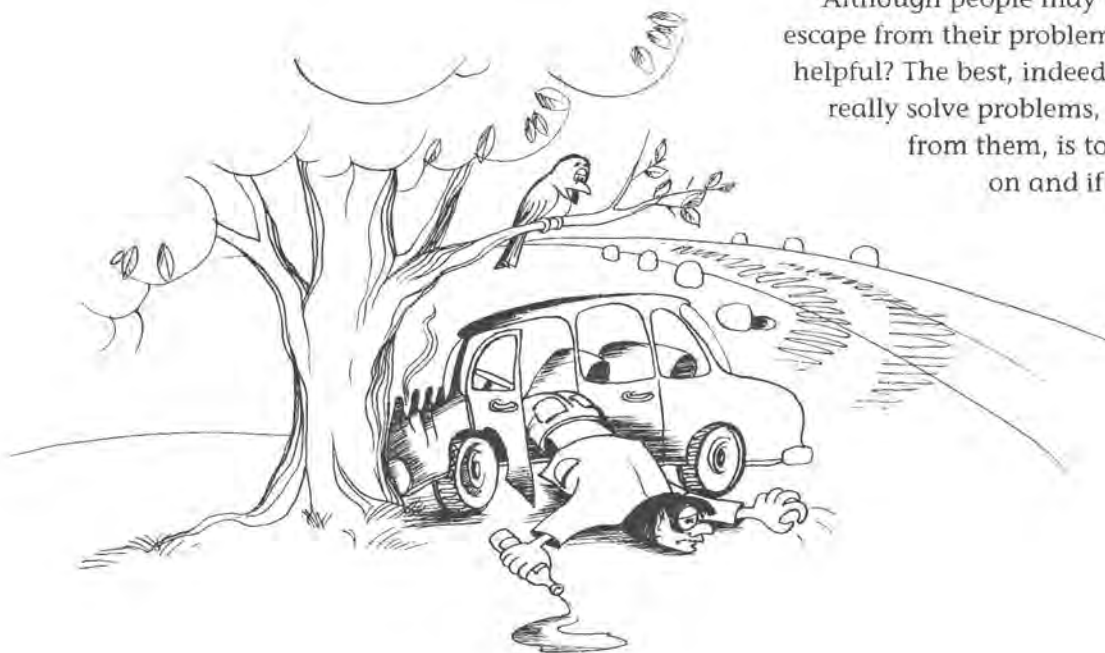
Every year thousands of people die and suffer ill health from the effects of smoking, drinking and drugs. What is it that attracts people to use these substances, which in some cases cause immediate death and in other cases cause terminal illnesses such as cancer and heart disease? Let us look at some of the facts behind cigarettes, alcohol and drugs.

### What is a drug?

In the course of our life almost all of us use drugs of some sort or another. A drug is a substance that alters the chemistry of our body and, consequently, affects the natural balance of our mind and emotions. Drugs that can be prescribed by a doctor include substances such as penicillin which are intended to cure infections, and sleeping pills, tranquilizers and anti-depressants, which are intended to help a person to relax. Cigarettes and alcohol, which we can "prescribe" for ourselves, have a similar function and are also drugs.

Adolescence can be a particularly difficult time. Teenagers may be under conflicting pressures from parents, school and friends, and many difficult choices may have to be made. It can also be a period of boredom and frustration. As a result, young people are vulnerable to the offer of something that may be fun or make them feel better. But they often don't know about the risks involved, or how easily a serious drug problem can develop.

Although people may use drugs to try to escape from their problems, is this really helpful? The best, indeed the only way to really solve problems, rather than escape from them, is to confront them head on and if necessary get help.



## What is drug abuse and drug addiction?

Drug dependence and drug addiction can be described as a condition in which the user has the following characteristics:

- ✗ An overpowering desire or need to continue taking the drug and to obtain it by any means
- ✗ A tendency to increase the dose
- ✗ A psychological and usually physical dependence on the effects of the drug
- ✗ The appearance of an “abstinence syndrome” with symptoms of acute distress when the drug is withdrawn
- ✗ Detrimental effects to both the individual and society

When a person is psychologically or physically addicted to a drug, he will experience “withdrawal symptoms” when he stops using the drug. Withdrawal symptoms for drug addicts may include yawning, runny nose, tears, sweating, loss of appetite, trembling, goose flesh, abdominal cramps, insomnia, restlessness, vomiting, diarrhea, and weight loss. As seen by the onset of such symptoms at the time of withdrawal from drugs, there is a physical basis for dependence. The drug actually becomes a part of the cell structure of the body. The addict comes to depend on the drug in order to function normally. But the other factor is psychological dependence, which may be even more difficult for a drug addict withdrawing from a drug.

## Smoking

### Why do people smoke?

The Russian Orthodox priest Alexander Elchaninov, who worked with young people, expresses clear insight into the real reasons and dangers behind smoking:

The motives that lead people to start smoking are mean and vulgar — wanting to be like others, fear of being laughed at, the desire to gain greater prestige: the psychology of a coward and a criminal combined. This leads to estrangement from family and friends. Aesthetically speaking, this vulgarity is especially insufferable in girls. Psychologically speaking, smoking opens the door to all that is forbidden and sinful. It obscures our sense of purity and chastity. Our first cigarette is already our first fall, the loss of our purity. It is not false Puritanism but an immediate feeling and a deep conviction, which leads me to say this to you. Ask any smoker — the beginning of smoking was for him, in a sense, a fall.

Once a person has started to smoke, even though he may wish to stop, he continues for reasons such as the following:

- ✗ from habit
- ✗ to relax
- ✗ for pleasure
- ✗ to conform
- ✗ because of advertising



## What happens when you smoke?

Tobacco is made up of some 300 chemicals, 40 of which are known poisons. When you smoke, chemicals enter the bloodstream.

- ✗ Nicotine is a very powerful drug that causes a rise in blood pressure and makes the heart beat faster.
- ✗ Tar from tobacco contains a number of substances that can cause cancer. When someone inhales tobacco smoke, the tar goes down into his lungs.
- ✗ Tobacco smoke contains irritants that affect the cells in the air passages. In order to protect the cells, mucus is produced. Smokers cough to try to clear the irritants and extra mucus.
- ✗ Tobacco smoke contains carbon monoxide, a deadly gas which affects the blood's ability to carry oxygen around the body. Without enough oxygen, the body works more slowly.

## Smoking and health

### Did you know?

- ✗ On average, each cigarette a person smokes shortens his life by 5 1/2 minutes.
- ✗ It takes 10 years after you stop smoking for your body to shake off the effects.
- ✗ Smoking can contribute to and cause many diseases, such as

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### Profile of a teenage smoker: Marcus Jones, age 15

**Interviewer:** How much do you smoke?

**Marcus:** About ten cigarettes a day.

**Interviewer:** How much does this cost you?

**Marcus:** Nearly \$10 a week.

**Interviewer:** When did you begin smoking?

**Marcus:** I had my first cigarette when I was about nine — I felt really sick. I started smoking regularly when I was about 13.

**Interviewer:** Do many of your friends smoke?

**Marcus:** Yes, about half of them, but a few are trying to give up.

**Interviewer:** And you, are you going to give up?

**Marcus:** Perhaps when I'm older.

**Interviewer:** Why did you start smoking?

**Marcus:** My mom and step-dad smoked. I started stealing their cigarettes. I feel a bit rebellious smoking, I suppose.

**Interviewer:** What do you mean?

**Marcus:** Well, it's not the thing to do these days, is it? So it feels different to be called a smoker.

- **Bronchitis:** Most deaths from chronic bronchitis are caused by smoking, tens of thousands of people each year
- **Emphysema:** This disease, of which smoking is one of the primary causes, causes the lungs to fill with fibrous matter, eventually making it impossible to breathe.
- **Heart disease:** Nicotine increases the heart rate and so wears down the heart. In addition, it damages the lining of the blood vessels, causing plaque to accumulate over the wounds and narrowing the vessels. Smoking is the cause of many deaths due to heart disease.
- **Cancer:** The great majority of deaths from lung cancer are caused by smoking.
- **Other problems:** Smokers are less fit than non-smokers, and are more likely to get colds, flu and other infections. Smoking can damage unborn babies, and can cause such problems as blood clots and stomach ulcers.

### Social effects

Smoking doesn't just affect your health. It also has other negative effects.

- ✗ **Money:** Cigarettes are expensive. Money spent on cigarettes can't be spent on clothes, records or other things.
- ✗ **Health services:** Smoking costs health services millions of dollars per year that could be better spent on other illnesses. Cigarette smoking is responsible for

many premature deaths and thousands of serious illnesses every year.

- ✗ **Pollution:** Non-smokers are forced to breathe smoke because of smokers around them, becoming “secondary smokers.” Many non-smokers find the behavior of smokers extremely anti-social. A recent report says that non-smoking wives who live with smoking husbands have a 50 percent increase in the chance of having lung cancer.
- ✗ **Ecology:** Acres of trees are cut down to dry and cure tobacco. The long-term effects of growing tobacco are deforestation, erosion of soil and loss of land fertility.

### Activities

1. Design a poster aimed at telling young people about the dangers of smoking.
2. Interview someone who is a smoker. Before you begin, draw up a list of the questions you are going to ask him or her. Afterwards, work in a group and compare the results of your interviews. Did you notice any difference between the answers of younger people and older people?

### Alcohol

Alcohol is a chemical, a drug, a fuel, a poison, a preservative and a solvent. When you drink, most of the alcohol is quickly taken into your bloodstream. It then has to be burned up by your liver, or disposed of in sweat or urine. Alcohol has very different effects on people, but you should always remember that, even though it makes some people very chatty and lively at first, alcohol is a depressant — that is, it slows certain brain functions. It blunts your judgment and self-control, and even simple things like speech and co-ordination become difficult.



#### Why do people drink alcohol?

- ✗ to celebrate
- ✗ to be social
- ✗ to relax
- ✗ to be adult
- ✗ to escape from reality
- ✗ for medicinal purposes
- ✗ in religious ceremonies

#### How does alcohol affect the body?

- ✗ **The heart:** Alcohol increases the blood pressure and the heart rate.
- ✗ **The nervous system:** Alcohol acts as a depressant.
- ✗ **The liver:** Alcohol passes through the liver, and over time the liver becomes diseased and cannot function.

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**Profile of a teenage drinker:  
Jackie Nelson, age 16**

**Interviewer:** How old were you when you started drinking?

**Jackie:** Twelve.

**Interviewer:** Did you buy some yourself or were you given it?

**Jackie:** My friend's elder brother bought some beer for us, then we drank it outside the youth club.

**Interviewer:** Where do you drink?

**Jackie:** In the street and at parties.

**Interviewer:** How much do you drink?

**Jackie:** As much as I can get, because I like it.

**Interviewer:** What do you drink?

**Jackie:** Anything I can afford, or that anyone will buy me. Vodka and orange is my favorite, because it makes you drunk quicker.

**Interviewer:** Do you always drink in order to get drunk then?

**Jackie:** Yes, of course.

**Interviewer:** Has drinking ever got you into trouble?

**Jackie:** Yes. I've had a couple of fights and been told off by the police.

**Interviewer:** Does that worry you?

**Jackie:** Why should it? It's not as though I'm on drugs, is it?

**Interviewer:** Aren't you worried that you might become an alcoholic?

**Jackie:** That's what the doctor said. But it's a load of rubbish. I could quit anytime I wanted.

- ✗ **The stomach:** Small amounts of alcohol may help digestion; large amounts cause vomiting.
- ✗ **The skin:** Alcohol may cause your skin to feel flushed and warm, but in reality your body loses heat.
- ✗ **The brain:** Alcohol affects the way you speak, think and behave. The brain becomes damaged after years of alcohol abuse, producing disorders resembling senility or even psychosis.
- ✗ **Body weight:** Alcohol consists of "empty calories." It will increase your body fat without providing nutrition.

### *The cost of alcohol*

- ✗ Thousands of alcohol-related deaths occur in every year.
- ✗ Hundreds of thousands of working days are lost due to alcoholism every year.
- ✗ People who are alcoholics are more likely to be unemployed.
- ✗ Heavy drinkers have three times the risk of cancer of the mouth and ten times the risk of dying from chronic liver diseases than non-drinkers.
- ✗ Fifty percent of murderers had been drinking at the time of the offense.
- ✗ Many car accidents are caused by people who have been drinking.
- ✗ Drinking can cause family fights, divorce, child and wife beating, poverty, absenteeism, road accidents and violence in the streets.

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## Questions for Discussion



### *Group discussions*

1. Talk about what Jackie says. Suggest reasons why Jackie drinks so much. Do you think Jackie is in danger of becoming an alcoholic?
2. If you were Jackie's friend, how would you try to persuade Jackie to stop drinking?

## Drugs

One problem that has become very serious in recent decades has been the misuse of narcotics, a particular type of drug that is used for recreational and not medicinal purposes.

### Why do people take drugs?

- ✗ as an escape. Drugs help some people forget that they are lonely, depressed, unhappy, unemployed or poor. Some people claim that they offer an alternative when reality has become too threatening.
- ✗ because of peer pressure. If your friends take drugs, it can be very difficult for you to resist. People are afraid to be different.
- ✗ for excitement. Some people *want* to be different. Some are attracted to drug taking simply because it is illegal, just as children sometimes just like being naughty for the sake of it. Some think drug taking makes them different from — perhaps superior to — everyone else. It can be a way of asserting independence from parents, perhaps a way of hitting back at them.
- ✗ because they want to (despite the dangers). They become attracted by the alternative culture.
- ✗ because they are addicted. They are unable to stop taking the drug. There are two types of addiction:
  - **physical:** The body becomes dependent on the drug, as with heroin or nicotine.
  - **psychological:** Taking the drug becomes such a habit that, although the body can go without, the mind cannot. Psychological addiction can be just as powerful as physical addiction, and many who take drugs regularly want to stop but cannot.

### What are the dangers of drug taking?

The main dangers are:

- ✗ having an accident while under the influence of drugs
- ✗ some drugs may depress or stop breathing
- ✗ accidental overdose may lead to unconsciousness or even death
- ✗ regular use can lead to addiction or dependence

### Drugs can also have nasty side effects.

- ✗ They can bring on confusion or frightening hallucinations.
- ✗ They can cause unbalanced emotions or more serious mental disorders.
- ✗ First-time heroin users are sometimes violently sick.
- ✗ Regular users may become constipated, and women may cease to menstruate.
- ✗ Later still, there might be more serious mental and physical effects.
- ✗ If a drug user starts to inject, infections leading to sores, abscesses, jaundice, blood poisoning and even AIDS may follow.



### *An experience with drug addiction*

This was the first time he had felt free from fear. After he had been persuaded to try the drug, an overwhelming sense of relief and deep happiness had come over him. He could not remember any time in his life when he had felt so free.

But the drug wore off and the fears came back. He could remember the awful day when he'd had to go up to the stage to fetch one prize after another. The hall had been packed with parents and school friends. He always had to do well. It was what his parents expected. He was their only son and they showed him off to relatives and friends. He was going to take on part of his father's business and was told he'd make a great success of that too. But what if he failed? Again the fear gripped him.

He was not going to become an addict. He could stop whenever he wanted to, but it was one way to freedom. Soon he needed to increase the amount he took to get the same effect. Then he tried other types of drugs. But this all had to be kept secret from his parents.

Upon leaving college they encouraged him to accept a girl in marriage. Quite soon there was a baby to think about and care for. With this came the fears that he would fail as a father. Eventually the drugs affected the way he ran the business and it collapsed. His parents disowned him and his wife threw him out.

Months went by until the pain of taking drugs was as great as the pain he was trying to avoid. At last he reached the point when he had to admit that he needed and wanted help.

He dragged himself to a drug rehabilitation center. He slept on the floor but remembered feeling more comfortable than he had been for months. He was given simple practical tasks to do, and regular discipline began to come back into his life. He began to talk and people understood. They didn't judge him. They accepted him and cared. ... There was plenty that needed to be changed in his life. The three people closest to him had been deeply hurt. He went to them so they could see the change in him. He admitted the wrongs he had done and asked forgiveness. Within two years he was back with his wife, they were expecting another baby and he was helping others find the freedom he had always longed for and had now found.



### *Why is taking drugs wrong?*

Let us summarize the reasons why the abuse of all drugs — nicotine, alcohol, and narcotics — is wrong.

- ✘ It is self-destructive, a violation of our obligation to respect and care for ourselves, develop our potential, and not damage our future.
- ✘ Drug abuse almost always leads to some other wrong behavior such as lying, stealing, or recklessness and violence.
- ✘ Drug abuse causes much suffering to those people, especially families, who care about the drug abuser.
- ✘ Drug abuse, whether by minors or adults, contributes to an enormously destructive social problem.



## Reaching your greatest potential

Every person has a vision of the future, of what he wants to be or what he wants to do with his life. Sometimes life is not easy, and we may find ourselves faced with seemingly insurmountable problems and pressures from every direction. It is at these times that a person is the most susceptible to behaving in a way he normally would not, including beginning to misuse drugs and alcohol. Other people, however, may only want to “try” drugs and/or alcohol to experience what people are talking about. However, this seemingly innocent interest can also rapidly lead to problems.

Even in times when you are struggling seriously or being pressured strongly by others, try to keep focused on the vision of who you are and the person you want to become. The potential that lies within you is not easy to develop and requires an exercise of will. You need to persevere through difficulties. All great people in history, without exception, were faced with difficult problems and suffering, and yet, by maintaining their personal integrity and using the challenges of life to grow, they became known by later generations as righteous people.

As funny as it may sound, you have the potential within to reach the level of greatness of all of those whom you admire. Perhaps with this vision of the kind of person you are becoming, you can even help your friends who may be faced with the same challenges.

### For Your Journal



Imagine that one of your good friends has a problem with alcohol. He began drinking socially with your group of friends to feel more relaxed and free, but after a short time you noticed that he seemed to be behaving differently in school — sometimes falling asleep during class, other times being rude to the teacher, and some days not coming to school at all. You also noticed that he was not finishing his schoolwork, and that his marks on exams were getting lower and lower. You want to help him. He is your friend, and you can see clearly that he has a problem with drinking. What would you do in this situation?