

DRUGS ABUSE

The number of children abusing drugs and substances is increasing every day. Alcoholism, drugs and substance abuse among children is gradually becoming a bigger problem in Kenya than many parents realize. Drug use among children and adolescents is a time bomb in many families. The bomb will one day explode and cause unbearable pain to parents as illustrated in a true testimony shared by anonymous parent. I called the testimony Brian's story.

Brian's story by the mother

Next month will be 3 years since the death of my son Brian who was only 19 years old. I still feel this strongly about how it feels to lose a child for me, it does not get any easier. I just learn to live with the pain. Brian was a high school student who in his senior year started smoking pot. We did not know because he never showed any signs of using drugs. One year later while attending college to become a meteorologist, he was abusing cocaine and pain medicines. That is when we really began to see a change in him. He became withdrawn and was sleeping a lot. Brian went for detox and we celebrated him being clean for six months. I really believed he was clean, but little did I know that Brian had moved on to heroin. On September 5, 2009 my son was found slumped over in his dad's Van one block from our home. He had died of an accidental heroin overdose. I shared this story 13 months after Brian died.

Brian's parent continued with the testimony...

“Losing a child is like having your chest torn open and having your heart ripped from your body with nothing to numb the pain.

Then you are left with a gaping, throbbing wound that bleeds constantly day after day.

The bleeding never end, it goes on for days, months and years.

Sometimes infections set in and the pain intensifies until you do not think you can stand it anymore.

All of a sudden, although the bleeding continues, the infection leaves, but only for a short time, lurking there in the open wound, only to surface again.

May be next week, or may be tomorrow, you just never know when.

You try everything to heal the wound but it will not heal.

It is stubborn and persistent.

So you go on day after day, month after month, year after year with this gaping hole in your chest where your heart used to be.

You try to fill it with other things, but nothing can fill the void. Nothing can numb the pain, nothing can stop the bleeding. Nothing”

The story of Brian is not uncommon. This story is a reality and a very real possibility for anyone. One day, one out of every four families will be impacted by alcohol and drug abuse. My concern is about preventing the same mistake that occurred in Brian's family to occur in our families today.

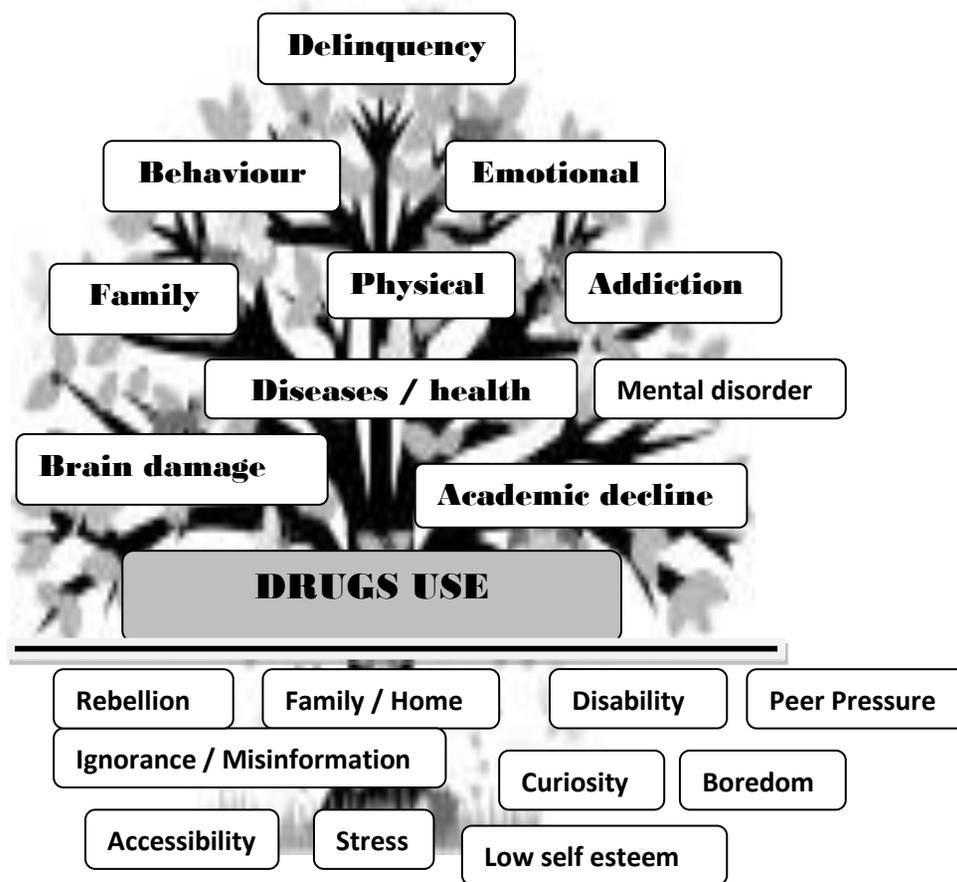
(Write all the lessons you can learn from the story of Brian about the dangers of using drugs to you and your family)

Children and adolescents who want to be successful in life, education and career should:

- a. Make good use of available time and opportunities.
- b. Make use their energy positively.
- c. Ensure they have good health (mental, physical, spiritual)
- d. Establish and maintain good relationship with self, God and other people
- e. Be emotionally stable.

(Honestly write the reasons why you want to stop drug abuse)

UNDERSTANDING THE ROOTS OF DRUGS ABUSE



(Honestly do a sincere self reflection and write down why you started or / and abuse drugs)

Reasons why children may abuse drugs and alcohol

1. **Availability of drugs:** Many drugs that are commonly abused are illegal. However, they are still available and accessible to children such as tobacco, alcohol, miraa, kubel and cocaine.
2. **Low self- esteem:** Children sometimes may take drugs to boost their self – worth or cover their feeling of inadequacy and inferiority complex.
3. **The need for acceptance.** Some children may turn to drug as a way of easing emotional problems. Children who feel unloved may turn to any group that is ready to accommodate them. Children who are unsuccessful and desperate in school and family life may turn to drugs and alcohol for comfort.
4. **Parental and significance others example.** Children tend to copy adults. Therefore, drug abuse is an attitude children learn from their parents and other adults in the society.
5. **Curiosity:** Children may take drugs and alcohol due the need of experimenting and desire for a pleasurable change in their state of mind.
6. **Peer influence:** Children may engage in drug taking due to the influence of their peers especially during adolescence. One may want to join a group of peers and be compelled to take drugs to conform to the group.
7. **Boredom:** Idleness among children may get them into drugs due to boredom. When children have no constructive activities they can engage in drugs and alcohol use to be busy. Parents should always ensure children are busy with constructive activities as a way of combating drugs abuse and alcohol use.
8. **Family breakdown.** Some drug problems affecting children are related to the breakdown of the family structure. Family breakdown includes;
 - Parents getting too much involved in their own things to an extent of excluding children.
 - Family divorce and separations. Some children who abuse drugs may be from families and homes without fathers. Boys from homes without male leadership may have no fatherly figures to identify with. Male children brought up by single mothers may develop feelings of

inadequacy as they identify with their mothers.

Such feelings may lead some to drug taking.

9. Influence of the rock music. Rock music tends to glorify the drug abuse culture. However, few parents understand the sub-culture jargon described through the words of hard rock and punk music. Children who are fun of such music may resort to drug taking as a way of identifying with such music and music heroes.

(Honestly do a self examination and write down how drug abuse has been affecting your life negatively)

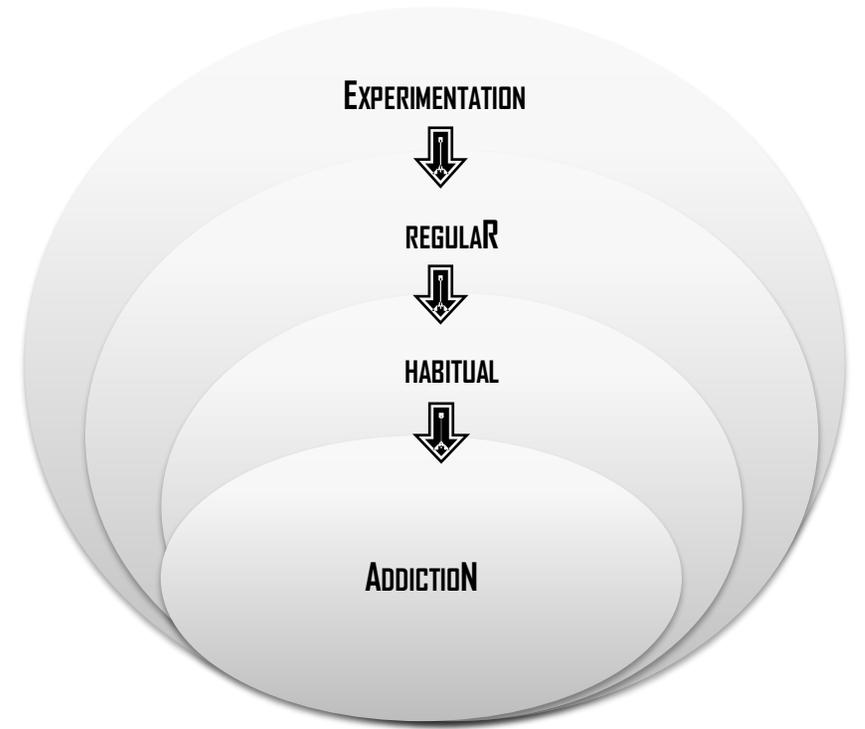
Addiction is a *progressive* condition that slowly exerts control on children. The control is both *psychological* and *physical*.

CYCLE OF ADDICTION

The cycle of addiction is the same for adults and children. The cycle has two conditions

- **Psychological effects:**
- **Physical effects:**

Stages of addiction



What causes behaviour addiction in children?

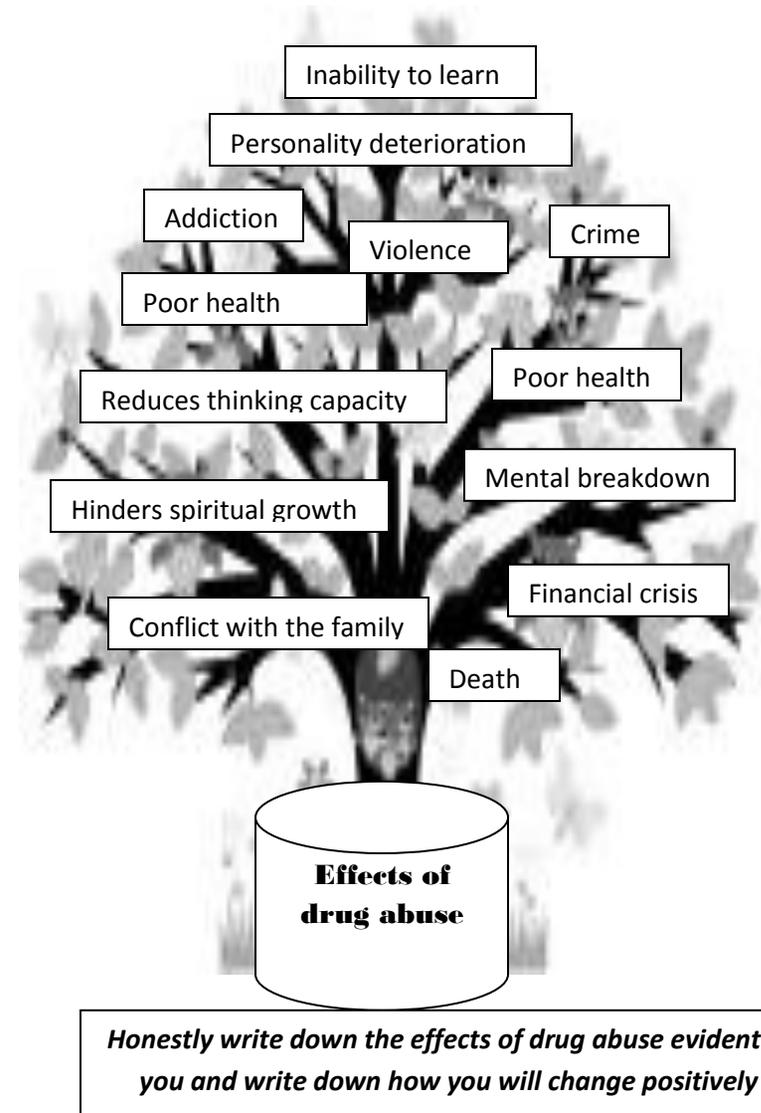
Behaviour addiction in children can be caused by the following factors

- a. The family background.
- b. Children personality.
- c. The stresses of life.
- d. Reinforcement or rewards that come as a result of the addictive behaviour.
- e. Peer influence.

Characteristics of children with drug personality

- i. They may not be interested in religion.
- ii. They may belong to unstable families.
- iii. They have do not care attitude (Apathy).
- iv. They may have high intellect.
- v. They are introverts.
- vi. They get easily influenced by peers.
- vii. They are likeable and friendly.
- viii. They may have few close friends.
- ix. They are quiet and peaceful.

(Honestly do a personal self evaluation, which of the above characteristics are evident in you)



WHAT IS MARIJUANA?

Marijuana refers to the dried leaves, flowers, stem and seeds from the hemp plant, cannabis sativa. The plant contains the mind altering (changing) chemical *delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol* (THC) and other related compounds. Extracts with high amounts of THC can be made from the cannabis plant.

WHAT ARE OTHER NAMES OF MARIJUANA?

Marijuana is also known as cannabis, rock, grass among other names.

LEGALIZATION

Marijuana in Kenya and most parts of the world is classified as illicit drug. It is not permitted by state laws.

WHO ABUSES MARIJUANA?

The use of marijuana is widespread among young people and adults. Studies show that the rates of marijuana use among high school and college students in Kenya have been increasing.

HOW DO PEOPLE USE MARIJUANA?

People use marijuana in many ways. They include:

- Smoking in hand rolled cigarette or pipes or cigars
- To avoid inhaling smoke, people use vaporizers. These devices pull the active ingredients from the marijuana and collect their vapour in a storage unit. A person then inhales the vapour, not the smoke.
- Marijuana can be mixed with food (edibles such as brownies, cookies or candy) or brew it as a tea.
- The newly popular method of use is smoking or eating different forms of THC rich resins like
 - Wax or budder
 - Hash oil / honey oil

HOW MARIJUANA DOES AFFECT THE BRAIN?

The effects of marijuana on the brain are both short and long term.

SHORT TERM EFFECTS

When a person smokes marijuana THC quickly passes from the lungs into the bloodstream. The blood carries the chemical to the brain and other organs throughout the body. The body absorbs THC more slowly when the person eats or drinks it. The use may feel the effects after 30 minutes to one hour.

THC acts on specific cell receptors that ordinarily react to natural THC chemicals in the brain. These natural chemicals play a role in normal brain development and functions.

Marijuana overactivates parts of the brain that contain the highest number of these receptors. This causes the “**high**” that users feel. Other effects include:

- Altered senses (seeing brighter colours)
- Altered sense of time
- Changes in mood
- Impaired body movements
- Difficulty with thinking and problem solving

LONG TERM EFFECTS

Marijuana affects brain development. When a person start using marijuana at teenage, the drug may reduce thinking, memory and leaning functions and affect how the brain builds connections between areas necessary for these functions. Marijuana effects on thinking, memory and learning ability may last a long time or even can be permanent.

Study shows that people who started smoking marijuana heavily in their teens and had an ongoing cannabis use disorder lost an average 8 IQ points between the ages 13 and 38 years. The lost mental abilities did not fully return in those who quit marijuana as adults.

WHAT ARE THE OTHER HEALTH EFFECTS OF MARIJUANA?

Physical effects

- **Breathing problems:** Marijuana smoke irritates the lungs. Frequent marijuana smokers can have the same breathing problems that tobacco smokers have. These problems include daily coughs and phlegm, more frequent lung illness and infections.
- **Increased heart rate:** Marijuana raises heart rate for up to 3 hours after smoking. This effect may increase the chance of heart attack.
- **Problem with child development during and after birth:** Marijuana use during pregnancy is linked to increased risk of both brain and behavioural problems in babies. If a pregnant woman uses marijuana, the drug may affect certain developing parts of the foetus's brain. The child such mothers may have problems with attention, memory and problem solving

Mental effect

Long term marijuana use has been linked to mental illness such as

- Temporary hallucinations: Sensations and images that seem real though they are not.

- Temporary paranoia : Extreme and unreasonable distrust of others
- Worsening symptoms in patients with schizophrenia (a severe mental disorder with such symptoms as hallucinations, paranoia and disorganized thinking.

HOW MARIJUANA DOES AFFECT A USER'S LIFE?

Compared to non users, heavy marijuana users more often report the following

- Lower life satisfaction
- Poorer mental health
- Poorer physical health
- More relationship problems
- Less academics success / School drop out
- Less career success.
- Accidents and injuries

IS MARIJUANA A GATEWAY TO OTHER DRUGS?

Researchers suggest that marijuana use is likely to come before use of other drugs. The studies therefore support the idea of marijuana as a "gateway drug"

IS MARIJUANA ADDICTIVE?

Marijuana users can develop some degree of problems use leading to dependence and in severe cases takes the form of addiction.

HOW CAN PEOPLE GET TREATED FOR MARIJUANA ADDICTION?

Long term marijuana users trying to quit report withdrawal symptoms that make quitting difficult. These include:

- Sleeplessness
- Decreased appetite
- Anxiety
- Craving

