

Drug Abuse

EFFECTIVELY CONFRONTING THE PROBLEM

Substance abuse and its ramifications in the Adventist educational system have become a pressing topic in recent years. This concern is, of course, related to current trends in society, where drug use among children and youth has reached epidemic levels.

Drug and alcohol abuse, which show no respect for social, ethnic, or religious background, can no longer be identified as urban, lower-class problems. They have now reached into every level of society. The media promote all manner of pills, potions, and products to cure every malady. Television and magazine ads show beautiful people having good times as the result of imbibing alcohol. Statistics reveal that most people have accepted the premises behind this advertising. Americans now drink more alcohol and swallow more pills than at any other point in history.

Yet, as Adventists we have expected immunity from substance abuse—immunity because of the location of our schools, our health message, and our religion. But we are not immune. We can no longer deny the fact that we have within our school system children and youth who are presently using and abusing alcohol and/or drugs.

In order to effectively address this problem, teachers and parents must first of all confront it forth-

rightly. Programs for combating substance abuse must include prevention, detection, intervention, and aftercare. A complete range of services and approaches must be used so that the redemptive function of education can be carried to every student, even those involved in drug and alcohol abuse.

Adventist educators have a unique opportunity to play a vital role in this program because of the special environment provided by our educational setting. The comprehensive program listed above should be part of every school program, from kindergarten level through college. Activities should be managed by a core group of administrators and teachers who are specially trained and appointed to handle substance abuse cases.

Drug and alcohol problems have traditionally been handled by the administrative council, where the student receives a disciplinary action of suspension or expulsion with little or no follow-up or aftercare. While suspension or expulsion can be valuable tools in helping a drug or alcohol abuser to recognize that his or her problem is out of control, severance should not constitute the final act of the school toward such students. By following the recommendations of the core group, administrators

should provide an avenue by which the student can complete a treatment program and re-enter school.

Treatment programs should be individualized, according to the stage of dependency exhibited by the particular student. Effective approaches might be as simple as peer-to-peer rap sessions guided by a counselor, such as Alateen; or as complex as a long-term residential program, such as Straight, Inc. However, the school should not be the treatment center. Its role is to serve as a referral agency.

Substance abuse has caused and is still causing the loss of students from our schools, youth and adults from our churches, and souls from the kingdom of God. It is time to put ignorance aside, investigate the scope of the problem, and educate professionals to implement a redemptive program. I hope that this special issue of the *JOURNAL* will lift our heads from the sand and give us the courage to face the truth. For we cannot, we must not, we dare not continue to avoid this issue. The future of our church and society is at stake.—Daniel K. Kittle. □

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