

DARKNESS ON YOUR DOORSTEP

A REPORT TO PARENTS ON JUVENILE NARCOTICS ADDICTION



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The following is a reprint of an unusual booklet, "DARKNESS ON YOUR DOORSTEP," originally printed by the County of Los Angeles in cooperation with the Community Coordinating Council Program for distribution to parents and teenagers to combat the growing threat of narcotics addiction. It alerts the reader to danger signals, emphasizes the importance of early treatment, and points up the tremendous costs of drug traffic to the community in human suffering and the loss of millions of dollars resulting from crimes committed by addicts.

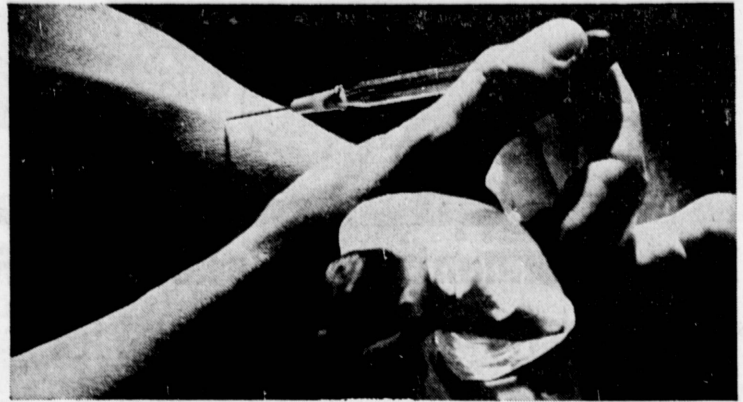
The booklet is an example of creative joint effort by the San Fernando Valley Councils, Federation of Community Coordinating Councils, County Department of Community Services, the Los

Angeles County Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs Commission, and by dedicated individual citizens.

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors has consistently supported constructive legislation in the field of narcotics and dangerous drugs. Since cities and counties cannot enter the legislative field which is already State occupied, and since narcotics is not a localized problem, this educational program was undertaken until more constructive State legislation can be enacted. We believe "DARKNESS ON YOUR DOORSTEP" is a significant first step in this direction.

Warren M. Dorn

WARREN M. DORN, Chairman
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THESE DRUGS ARE DANGEROUS



What are the drugs most commonly misused? Most of them are good products, but they have been turned to wrong purposes. Most are legally sold only on prescription. They can be extremely harmful when taken without a doctor's advice.

PAIN-KILLERS AND COUGH MEDICINES have also become a problem. Most of them contain opium in one form or another. Or they may contain one of the synthetic substitutes for morphine, which has about the same effect. Some teen-agers drink several bottles of cough medicine a day. This is serious business.

The opiate drugs are habit-forming. The victim has need of larger and larger doses. If he cannot get these drugs, he suffers the miseries of withdrawal sickness.

GLUE-SNIFFING is another source of excitement for some. They sniff or inhale various products, usually by means of a rag soaked in the fluid. They use the kind of glue made for putting together model airplanes and gliders. Lacquer thinner, benzene, gasoline, and solvents are other materials employed by sniffers. They get a brief feeling of walking on air. But they also run the risk of severe hallucinations and may engage in dangerous activity. One boy sees elephants. Another tries to fight an oncoming train. Glue-sniffing can cause severe damage to the bone marrow, liver, kidneys, brain, or heart. It can lead to long physical and mental suffering. Anybody who stays with it is very sick. Glue-sniffers suffer from nausea, irritability, constant sleepiness, and weight-loss.

MARIJUANA is the maverick among the drugs, for it has no good use. It is against the law to raise or distribute it. It is commonly smoked in a homemade cigarette. It is a kind of hemp, but it looks like tobacco. And most youngsters have tried smoking tobacco. They need to know that marijuana destroys depth perception so that a user might try stepping right over the Grand Canyon. They need to know marijuana smokers are likely to get into fights and hurt themselves or others. They go looking for trouble and usually find it. The feeling of importance it gives is false. The courage it seems to supply is a trick. To smoke marijuana is to be especially stupid.

HEROIN which looks like epsom salts, is made from opium. It is the most powerful of all drugs. It is the most habit-forming and the most dangerous. It is ugly, too—it makes sores and abscesses on the body. It is against the law to manufacture, import, or sell heroin. Only a peddler would have heroin for sale.

Usually it is taken by being injected into a vein with a hypodermic needle. The needle is dangerous, aside from the heroin. The use of a dirty needle can transmit venereal diseases, hepatitis, tetanus, or other illnesses. If there is any air in the needle, it can make a bubble that stops the heart and kills the victim.

OXYCODONE a cheaper narcotic in tablet form, is legally available and is now being offered by peddlers. Boys and girls less tempted by heroin because they don't like the needle, nor the scars it makes, nor the way it collapses the vein may turn to this severe form of addiction.

"BENNIES" are named for the amphetamine sulphate in some kinds of pills. They are often called pep pills. One kind is taken by drivers to keep awake while driving a truck or car. This is a dangerous thing to do. The National Safety Council has warned that drivers who take "bennies" have more accidents than other people. They think they see something on the road and swerve when there is really nothing there.

Athletes sometimes take pep pills to do better in a sports event. They do not know that amphetamine lowers control of muscles. They may feel high, but they do worse.

A student may take something like this in a foolish effort to improve his work on a test. He may feel pepped up and have a clear mind. However, his coordination may be impaired to the extent that he cannot write in an organized manner.

Many reducing tablets have amphetamine in them. People who take them wonder what makes them so nervous. This is it.

Some boys and girls take "bennies" to get a lift. Sometimes they combine them with sleeping pills. The combination makes them very drunk. An overdose may lead to mental illness or even death.

SLEEPING PILLS are barbiturates. Drug users call them reds, yellows, or blues because of the colored capsules they come in. There are at least a dozen of them sold under well known brand names. They are so common in the U.S. that many people think of them as harmless. And yet the National Office of Vital Statistics reports that barbiturates lead all other drugs as a cause of accidental death.

In 1962, more juvenile arrests were made for the misuse of barbiturates than for any other drug. Some think of sleeping pills as a quick way of feeling good. They call them goof-balls. When a boy or girl takes a goof-ball, he relaxes. He may fall asleep. If he takes a large dose, he may remain unconscious for many hours. In one instance, a boy lay in a stupor for nine days in a California hospital as a result of taking sleeping pills.

Even small doses of barbiturates can be harmful. If they are taken over a long time, they can be habit-forming. And yet peddlers are selling "reds" for about 20¢ a pill.

TRANQUILIZERS are thought of as mild. But these are making trouble, too. Teen-agers sometimes combine tranquilizers, bennies, or goof-balls with soft drinks or with alcohol in their search for kicks. Sometimes they combine one drug with another. Even mild drugs become dangerous when they are used this way.

"Drug users begin young," says the police officer. You say, "But I give my children a good home... plenty of love... lots of healthy fun. They know the difference between right and wrong. They won't take drugs."

A psychiatrist answers, "Young people seek new experiences. Each in some way tests the forbidden. He smokes a cigarette. Steals something from the market. Drives too fast. He is learning about life. He is seeking excitement. He will try anything once. The main thing is he does not keep doing the same bad things. He goes on to something else in his experimentation."

No teen-ager wants to be a square. This feeling can make trouble, too. A boy or girl will try on a dare something he would not do otherwise. It is the idea of trying anything once and the wish to be a right guy that makes the problem—even for the ones from good homes.

So what do you do? First you inform yourself. You have to know what you are talking about. And then you talk to your boy or girl. We hope this pamphlet will help you. Don't let this matter go. Taking dope is different from other bad behavior. Once a person becomes an addict, he can't control his habit. His habit controls him.

DRUG USERS ARE HEADED FOR DISASTER

The drug user enters a dangerous world. He risks his mental and physical health. He retreats from his friends and his family to be with strangers who can supply his needs.

The drugs which he took at first for fun have become an emotional necessity. He associates with users and peddlers engaged in lawlessness and crime. In this underworld of drugs, he learns about stronger narcotics. A peddler shows him how to roll a marijuana cigarette. He watches the preparation and injection of heroin. Perhaps a pusher supplies a beginning dose for nothing.

All drugs are habit-forming, but some drugs are addictive. This is where the idea of being hooked comes in. The user of addictive drugs finds he must take larger and larger doses to get satisfaction. He develops drug tolerance—that is, his body changes to withstand the drug. And once changed, the tissues continue to demand increasing doses. Thus, the victim runs the full course of addiction. He is both physically and emotionally dependent. If he does not take the drug, the agony of withdrawal begins: vomiting, cramps, misery.

Cures are uncertain. The victim may pass through withdrawal and stop taking drugs, but he is not fully free. Whenever he is faced by a difficult problem, he may be tempted to take drugs again. He can never be sure that he is completely safe.

YOUTHFUL USERS TURN TO CRIME

Testimony before a subcommittee of the California State Senate has indicated that thefts by drug users cost the citizens of Los Angeles about \$200,000 per day. Other testimony said that the drug traffic costs California taxpayers over \$66,000,000 per year.

The boy or girl who takes drugs needs money, for drugs are expensive. Though he may seek and find a job, he usually has a hard time holding it. His growing habit demands more and more financial support.

Then he may try stealing. He commonly begins by taking things from home. Often he rifles his mother's purse. A boy may turn to theft and burglary. A girl may try shoplifting. She may be headed toward prostitution.

Many are afraid to steal. If they are caught, they might be placed where they cannot get drugs. It seems simpler to be a peddler and sell drugs. The peddler's customers will seldom expose him.

Drug peddlers, however, cannot live by selling only to each other. Each must create new users. A customer may be a competitor tomorrow. Victim by victim, the vicious underworld of drugs soon invades an entire community.

DANGER SIGNALS FOR PARENTS

Most parents can look at their boys and girls and see that all is well. But some will want to know what the signals of drug misuse may be. For them these signs of trouble are included.

Has your youngster become secretive about his friends and his activities? Does he seem to be mixed up in some private business? Making appointments? Meeting people? Suddenly disappearing? Does he make unlikely excuses for all this? Has he picked up a lot of drug users' terms—*stash, connection, fix, weed, hay, yellow jackets, red devils, veefers, sticks, and others?*

Is he developing bad attitudes? Does he make fun of parents, teachers, police officers? Does he label most people as squares? Does he make fun of the good standards of people he used to like?

Is he slipping in school? Has he dropped the athletics he used to enjoy? Has he given up clubs and social life? Has his interest in the opposite sex grown less instead of greater?

Has he begun to have drowsy spells during the day? Have there been times when it was much harder to wake him up than usual? Has he seemed knocked out, rather than sleepy?

Does he go through periods of undue excitement? Is he sometimes walking on air? Does he seem drunk? Can you smell solvent on his clothing? Does he have burns about the nose and mouth which could come from sniffing?

Does he have an excessive need of money? Is he always hunting jobs, losing jobs, changing jobs? Does he talk about leaving school to make better wages? Are household things disappearing? Is money missing from your purse or wallet? Yet, does he seem to be spending so little that you can't imagine where his money goes?

Has he gone in for long sleeves which may hide needle marks or the scars of injections? Does he have skin sores or a severe constipation which some drugs produce?

Does he have a stash... a collection of pills or powders... an outfit of injection equipment... a packet of weedy-smelling leaves and stems?

DRUGS ARE AVAILABLE

How do boys and girls come by these dangerous drugs? How generally are they available? They are easier to get than you might think. The *family medicine chest* supplies some of them. Have you looked at it lately to see what your boy or girl might find? There is that bottle of sleeping tablets, since Dad needs a pill sometimes to sleep. There is that reducing aid Mom has been taking—with benzedrine in it. There is that envelope of pills which the dentist supplied when Junior had his tooth extracted. And nobody remembers who owns the bottle of cough medicine.

A more careful reading of medicine labels, and asking what is in a prescription, is a good idea. A label that says, "This prescription not to be refilled" is a warning that the contents need special care. Many drugs do not have this, however.

Getting rid of dangerous drugs as soon as you don't need them is a good idea. Many chemical changes occur in medicines after awhile, anyway. They should not be taken after you have kept them for some time. A second good idea is to keep a dangerous medicine where it can be used only by the owner.

Products used for sniffing are in such general use that they could hardly be forbidden by law. They can be bought anywhere and are available in the nearest supermarket, dime store, or hobby shop. Home and school training must prevent their misuse.

A youngster's first experience with dangerous drugs often comes when a friend gives him a sample. Once his habit is established, he is likely to buy from a peddler. Maybe you are thinking that a peddler is an evil-looking person that anyone could recognize. But many peddlers are very young themselves and can easily hang around recreation centers and teen-age spots without being noticed.

Opium products can be bought from such peddlers. Heroin costs about \$3 per capsule on the street. Other opium derivatives in tablet form to be taken by mouth cost as little as 50¢. The use of these tablets has grown to be very serious.

YOU CAN HELP

Your boy or girl needs to know the damage drug abuse can do. Junior and senior high schools teach the facts about narcotics. Churches and government agencies have programs, too. But these vary in skill and coverage. A good parent has an influence in his own family that no other person can have. What you say helps in a special way.

How do you talk to a teen-ager about this?

Be frank. He needs to know that drug misuse is more serious than some other things. He needs to understand the results that even sampling can cause.

Be honest. Your boy or girl may say, "But doctors give people drugs. A dose just once in awhile is nothing." He needs to know that a single dose can be too much. You never experiment with drugs. The effect of a drug on a healthy person is different from the effect on a sick one. People vary greatly in how they react to drugs. You cannot tell in advance how bad they will be for you.

Be factual. He needs to know which drugs are dangerous. He should learn that many medicines are taken only on a doctor's order. Smart people do not sample the medicines of others. Even candy and gum are sometimes made with drugs in them. They do not taste good, however. He should not swallow something that tastes strange.

Be definite. Warnings can be too vague. They only make the subject sound exciting. Tell a youngster the truth—that drugs lower mental output... reduce muscular coordination... cause people to have hallucinations about hearing and seeing things... damage the heart and other organs... wreck the nervous system. Drugs damage reputations and wreck friendships, too.

Outline a procedure. Wise families face the fact that young people may be offered a dangerous drug. You need to work out with your boy or girl what he should do in case this happens. The person who offers drugs or narcotics to another is committing a crime. He must be reported. School and playground authorities, and owners of eating places, theaters, and drive-ins should be warned.

IF DARKNESS REACHES YOUR DOORSTEP

If you are uncertain about your boy or girl, do not delay. For your own peace of mind and for his sake, seek help at once. Putting this off can only weaken his health further and bring greater trouble to the family. Your doctor can confirm or dispel your suspicions. He can tell you how serious the situation is and give the help needed.

Other people can help—your youngster's school, your church, a family service agency, a social worker, juvenile authorities.

Much progress has been made in the treatment of drug users. When they are identified in the early stages—before they have become addicts—they benefit from treatment more readily. The important thing is to get to them quickly.

The Juvenile Court plans treatment and rehabilitation programs for young drug users. On the basis of examination and other facts in the situation, a recovery program is arranged. The Court always tries to return the youth to the home of his parents whenever the parent is willing to cooperate. He is not handled as a criminal. There is no publicity where juveniles are concerned.

A fully addicted user needs controls from outside of himself and this ordinarily means institutional treatment. New State programs provide for control and treatment of addicted persons under non-criminal commitment to the California Rehabilitation Center in Corona. The District Attorney must take the first steps in committing a person to the Rehabilitation Center, and his office should be contacted for guidance and advice. The minimum age at which a person may be committed to the Rehabilitation Center is eighteen. If you know of a youngster, whether eighteen or not, whom you believe to be addicted, a good place to turn for advice is the District Attorney or your local police department.

Persons committed to the Center must stay for at least six months, as this is considered the shortest time required to develop the self-control necessary to avoid return to narcotics use. After six months or more in the Center, the former user may be returned home. When he does return home, he needs much help. He has to learn to face problems without taking drugs. He needs to feel that his folks have faith in him and that others do, too. He still needs controls from outside of himself and is, therefore, placed under the supervision of a specially-trained parole agent and required to undergo regular anti-narcotics testing. Commitments to the Rehabilitation Center are for a period of five years, but it is planned that in most cases the majority of this time will be spent in the community under parole supervision. Much is known about helping even fully addicted drug users to control themselves and this help is available to those who seek it.

Some parents try to ignore or hide their youngster's use of drugs. When they do this, the drug abuse continues. The problem becomes worse and worse. Thus, they prepare their children for a life of ugliness and misery.

Your police department faces many problems in enforcing drug laws. A peddler's victims almost never complain. Somebody else has to report on this lawless society. In some localities, the police are understaffed. Few towns have juvenile officers who specialize in dealing with drug problems.

You can help. When you know a youngster is getting drugs, report this to the police—even if you don't know who the peddler is. Always act to protect a boy or girl.

Drug abuse is one of the many problems that cause juvenile delinquency. You help to reduce these problems whenever you join other parents to undertake and support projects for youth...

good recreational programs... youth employment services... health training... personal and family counseling... moral, ethical, and spiritual development.

You help when you work with other parents to make neighborhood agreements as to what is suitable teen-age conduct and what is not. You help when you abide by these agreements in your own home. You help when you have in your own family so clear an understanding of what is done or not done that it reaches other boys and girls as they visit in your home.

You can work with others to drive out delinquency. If you do not belong to an organization to do this, join one. Your local Community Coordinating Council is trying to help, and there are other groups, too. Join with those who work for the good of your community. Turn on a light... and there will be no darkness on your doorstep.