



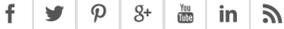
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HOME / MUMBAI / PEER PRESSURE LEADING TEENS TO DRINKS AND DRUGS

Peer pressure leading teens to drinks and drugs

— By Adele Macdonald | Sep 16, 2014 12:08 am



Mumbai : Anshul Singh started experimenting with cigarettes and alcohol from the age of 12. By the time he turned 15, he had to be admitted to a rehabilitation centre because of severe depression and suicidal tendencies. The boy would slip into depression every time he was made to abstain. Anshul even had seizures because of drug overdose. His parents, who are both doctors, learnt of their son's problem from his friend's parents. Anshul is now a normal teenager.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), although adolescents drink less frequently and in lesser amounts, they tend to binge. In fact, their studies show that 22.6 per cent of the 15-19 age group have been drinking for three or more years. NCRB statistics show that one

in ten adolescents are abusers of alcohol and/or drugs.

Dr Arun John, director of Vandrevala Foundation, a distress helpline, said, "So far this year, we have got 21,000 distress calls to our helpline and 434 of them were from teenagers suffering from substance abuse. A lot of them are panic calls because substance abuse over a long period of starts manifesting itself physically. They complain of their hands shivering, lack of concentration and anxiety."

Psychiatrists say the easy availability of drugs and alcohol these days has become a major problem. These substances are considered as addictive as technology for teenagers. When they are made to abstain from using these, they begin to lash out and show extreme withdrawal symptoms. It is at this time that they become depressed and start displaying suicidal tendencies.

A member of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), said, "I started drinking at the age of 16. The problem became so bad by the time I was 18 that I could not appear for my higher secondary examinations as I was made to drop a year. I needed alcohol all the time and would prefer staying out of my senses as it was my first time away from home and I did not have this freedom at home." He added that his parents would send him money as and when he asked them for it without questioning him about why he needed it. His new junior college friends introduced him to alcohol. He is now recovering with the help of support groups as he could not cope with the problem by himself.

Dr Yusuf Matcheswalla, honorary psychiatrist at JJ, GT, Masina, and Saifee Hospitals said, "Teenagers start indulging in substance abuse because of peer pressure. They do not realise when they start needing these substances for their sustenance. Abstinence is difficult for them because they do it to look cool among their peers." He added that children have started trying cigarettes and alcohol as early as eight to nine years of age.

Shreya Mhatre, a counsellor at Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), said that the best way for parents to intervene is by teaching them self-control from an early age. "Parents these days give their children whatever they want immediately. It is because of this attitude of parents that children don't understand the value of money and don't think twice before misusing their resources," said Mhatre.

Psychiatrists advise parents to catch on to signs of substance abuse in their teenagers early on. Their asking for money frequently, detached behaviour, avoiding eye contact and staying out of the house for longer hours than usual are warning signs that parents should watch out for.

(This is the fourth in a series on teenage suicide.)

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Distress helplines

AASRA: 022-27546669 24-Hour Helpline
The Samaritans Mumbai: 022-32473267, Monday- Sunday, 3 pm to 9 pm
Vandrevala Foundation: 1860-2662345, 24-Hour Helpline
iCall: 022-25563291, Monday to Saturday 10 am to 10 pm

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