



## CLOSE CALL

Jimmie's story

Jimmie was a senior in high school and had always been a bright student with dreams of going to college. He started drinking alcohol at parties with his friends so he didn't look uncool. After a few parties, Jimmie really liked the way drinking made him feel, so he started to drink on his own outside of parties, and eventually started drinking every night to unwind and relax.

Soon Jimmie realized he had a problem but was afraid to confront it. His parents thought it was just a phase he was going through and simply looked the other way. One afternoon Jimmie was drinking and got a little hungry. On his way to the local fast food restaurant, he lost control of his vehicle and nearly hit another driver head on. He veered from the other vehicle just in time.

Jimmie pulled over and called his Mom and she quickly came to pick him up. His parents realized that Jimmie had a problem and they got him help. Jimmie was lucky that day. He went on to be a successful college graduate, but his life could have turned out much differently.

## TEST YOURSELF!

Take this quiz to find out how much you know about addiction.

- Addiction is a choice.
  - True
  - False
- Gateway drugs cannot lead to addiction.
  - True
  - False
- Genetics play a factor in addiction.
  - True
  - False
- You should consult a doctor or specialist when confronting addiction.
  - True
  - False
- Alcohol is not a gateway drug.
  - True
  - False

# ADDICTION AND GATEWAY DRUGS



Answers: 1. b; 2. b; 3. a; 4. a; 5. b

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## NOT JUST A PHASE



## WHAT IS ADDICTION?

Addiction is a physical or psychological dependence on something, mainly a substance or behavior. It is caused when neurotransmitters in the brain signal to your body a need for a particular substance. Addiction is different from a habit because addiction is not a conscious choice. Many parents feel that when their teens abuse a substance it is just a phase they are going through and that they will grow out of it. Most often, this is not the case. Many teens are suffering from addiction and are crying out for help.

## WHAT CAUSES ADDICTION?

Addiction can be caused from chemicals in the drug or from psychological factors. Certain risk factors exist for addiction. These include:

**Genetics** – Those with family members with an addiction are more prone to addiction.

**Gender** – Males are more prone to addiction than females.

**Mental illness** – Mental illness increases the risk for addiction.

**Peer pressure** – If their friends are doing it, they may be pressured into trying a substance, leading to addiction.

**Age** – The younger the age of first substance use, the more likely to be addicted to the substance.

## "IT'S HARMLESS, RIGHT?"

### Gateway Drugs

Gateway drugs are drugs that may seem "harmless" but can lead to abuse of harder substances. Gateway drugs are the first substances abused by many teens. Once they start using these substances they are more likely to take greater risks with other drugs.

In many cases our society sees gateway drugs as normal teenage behavior and parents are more likely to overlook addiction to a gateway drug. Many teens often say they were pressured by their friends to take these drugs and were told that everyone was doing it, so they gave in. After a while, gateway drugs become commonplace, and many teens move on to harder substances seeking a higher thrill. Gateway drugs include alcohol, marijuana and tobacco, which includes smokeless tobacco.

## HOW CAN YOU TELL?

### Signs of addiction

There are many warning signs for addiction. Many times a person is crying out for help and simply needs someone to be there to come to terms with their addiction.

### Here are a few warning signs:

- Makes excuses to break social engagements
- Withdraws from friends and family
- Smells like a substance or has other physical signs of addiction
- A drop in grades or work performance
- Always short on money
- Stealing from friends and family



## RECOGNIZE A PROBLEM?

### What Can You Do About It?

If someone you know has an addiction, it is not always easy to confront the situation. However, in the long run you are doing them no favors by trying to pass off their addiction as a phase.

With addiction, it is important that a person be aware of the problem so they can confront it. If someone you know has an addiction you should:

- Calmly confront them about the problem.
- Explain that you are willing to help them every step of the way.
- Consult a physician about side-effects.
- Search your home for the substance and get rid of it.
- Develop a plan with a physician, support group and/or other professionals to break the addiction.
- Change the environment if you can. It is often easier to overcome addiction in a new setting.
- Hold them accountable to you and others for their actions and encourage them often.