



# Family Concerns

"Bridging the Information Gap"

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## HAPPINESS IS NOT A PILL

*Junior High and High School Students looking for joy in all the wrong places*

"I know that I'm not a parent or anything but I did have a friend who died from an ecstasy overdose. He was 15 and in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. He was a good person and my best friend. One day him and a few of my other friends skipped school and went to this kid's house. When they got there they got handed one bean apiece. The people that my friends were with were drug dealers ... My closest friend was the one to die. His body overheated and he got dehydrated. The house they were at was a drug dealers' house and he didn't want to deal with the cops so they just put him in the woods somewhere and called the cops on a pay phone to tell them where he was at. By the time the cops got there my best friend was dead and he still had a temperature of 104." [Anonymous; posted on an Ecstasy web site]

"I was seventeen when I took my first pill and I had the time of my life for the next six hours. Unfortunately, you never get as high the second time. OR the third, the fourth, the fifth. I started popping pills like candy, buying four or five at a time (That's \$20 a pill) every weekend ... I couldn't be happy without it. I could be myself at a party unless I was completely gone and chewing on a pacifier ... I wish I'd known then how much that drug screws with the mind. I'm always sad now, and I can't think as well as I used to. Concepts and memories that used to be clear are impossible to make sense of, and it takes longer for me to think of things and answer relatively simple questions. Fortunately for me I was intelligent to begin with, but it hurts to know I've lost so much ... X took away my happiness, my future, and most of my friends. IT took away the home I'd grown up in ..." [Aurora; posted on an Ecstasy website]

### Ecstasy is far from it

Ecstasy, or MDMA (3, 4 methylenedioxymethamphetamine) is a synthetic psychoactive drug chemically similar to methamphetamine and the hallucinogen mescaline. The street names for the drug are Adam, XTC, hug, beans, and love drug. The drug produces an energizing effect, as well as distortions in time and perception and enhanced pleasure. For some, it can be addictive. A survey of young adult and adolescent MDMA users found that 43 percent of them would meet the diagnostic norm for depression. 60 percent report withdrawal symptoms, including fatigue, loss of appetite, depressed feelings and trouble concentrating. Ecstasy effects last about six hours with a let-down that can be extreme. Chronic users of MDMA perform more poorly on cognitive and memory tasks. In high doses, MDMA can interfere with the body's ability to regulate temperature which can lead to a sharp increase in body temperature, resulting in liver, kidney and cardiovascular system failure and death. Users also experience increases in heart rate and blood pressure, muscle tension, involuntary teeth clenching (infant pacifiers are passed out at parties to keep from damaging the jaw and teeth), nausea, blurred vision, faintness, and chills and sweating. Psychological effects can

include confusion, depression, sleep problems, drug craving, and severe anxiety which can sometimes last for days or weeks. To learn more about this drug and how it works, go to this useful web site, which uses easy-to-understand drawings and explanations:

<http://www.dancesafe.org/slideshow/slide24.html>

### Not a ghetto drug

In case you are thinking this drug is limited to the inner city ghettos, think again. In Johnson County students were given the Communities that Care survey from the Department of Health and Human Services (SAMHSA). This is a survey developed to determine levels of risky behavior in youth and to help communities, schools and parents to build better strategies in dealing with the risky behaviors. The survey is given to students in the sixth, eighth, tenth and twelfth grade. The schools use the voluntary survey information to determine a community's level of risk in adolescent risky behavior. All six school districts in the county participated in the study which found that smoking is down, alcohol usage is down slightly, but the use of Ecstasy is up from 8.3 percent to 19.3 percent. [KC Star Wednesday, July 18, 2007]

### Risk Factors

The risk factors that affect adolescent problem behaviors have been developed by researchers of the survey. Some of the factors that affect not only substance abuse, but delinquency, teen pregnancy, school drop-out and violence are: extreme economic deprivation, a family history of problem behavior, family crisis management problems, family conflict; academic failure beginning in late elementary school, early and persistent antisocial behavior, peer pressure, and early initiation of the problem behavior. Other factors include low neighborhood attachment, media portrayals of violence and drug use and attitudes of parents, friends and the community toward the problem behavior.

### Attitudes are not going the right direction

Unfortunately, according to the National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA), recent surveys have found that there is a weakening of attitudes among the youngest of students regarding MDMA. The proportion of 8<sup>th</sup>-graders reporting perceived risk of harm from using MDMA once or twice decreased significantly from 40 percent in 2005 to 32.8 percent in 2006, and perceived harm from using it occasionally dropped from 60.8 percent to 52 percent. Disapproval of use also decreased significantly among 8<sup>th</sup>-graders for both trying the drug once or twice and for taking it occasionally.

### Parents can help

Parents need to pay attention to their kids; they need to keep the lines of communication open and, above all, spend significant amounts of time with them. Give them approval for their accomplishments and love them unconditionally. Pray for them without ceasing. Teach them that joy comes from a heart that is in tune with the Creator of the Universe, not from a drug.