

IMPAIRED JUDGMENT

Some students unfazed by consequences of substance use

By Ashley Golden and Jordan Watkins

Partying. Drinking. Doing drugs. Students are taught about these bad choices when they start their first health class in sixth grade.

They know the consequences. They understand them. They could probably even teach a lesson on them.

And some just don't care.

They party anyway. They drink anyway. They get high anyway.

"I think it's more of a high school trying to have fun thing. Eventually you need to buckle down; there's a time and a place," said a sophomore girl who didn't want her name revealed for fear of retribution.

Despite the thrill of partying, drinking and smoking, some students at Maize share a common plan: They say they'll quit after high school.

"When you get out of high school, life starts. You don't want to be doing that stuff anymore," said a sophomore boy who wished to remain unnamed for fear of retribution.

However, leaving bad habits behind

them after high school might not be as easy as students imagine.

USD 266 police officer Chad Cornish said quitting after high school is an unrealistic plan, as drugs are often abused even more in college.

Meredith Reuter, an adolescence counselor at Higher Ground, said students might face addiction much sooner than they think.

"People have this idea of addiction as a down-the-road thing," she said. "We don't diagnose abuse that way."

At Higher Ground, a substance abuse treatment center in Wichita, substance abuse and substance dependence diagnoses are based upon the criteria of the American Psychological Association. Using their system of categorizing, patients can be diagnosed and helped.

Abuse and dependence are very common in both drugs and legal substances such as cigarettes, hookah and alcohol. Even though legal, they all can cause serious health effects.

"It's definitely a double standard that

alcohol and cigarettes are legal and other substances aren't because these are very harmful," Reuter said.

Reuter said that at Higher Ground, some of her patients have the same beliefs as several students, such as the thought that they can stop at any moment and that the health consequences are not accurate or going to affect them.

"For the most part, people have things to learn while here," she said. "Effects of drugs on mood and brain surprises them."

Students believe they are strong enough to avoid addiction and adverse health effects.

"I know that it's really bad, but I'm having a hard time caring," the sophomore girl said.

She said addiction is not a possibility for her, regardless of what the experts say.

"They obviously haven't met me," she said.

Students laugh when told of the affects of substance use and sneak around their



parents, and the law, to buy and use them.

One student went as far as to steal at school to pay for illegal substances, Cornish said.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, half of the students who start smoking cigarettes in high school will smoke for at least the next 15 years, a habit that causes 5 million deaths a year. On average, smokers die 13 to 14 years earlier than non-smokers.

The Center for Disease Control also stated that 11.9 percent of Kansans age 12 to 17 smoked a cigarette in the past month. This puts Kansas teen smokers at a higher rate than the national average.

Kansas is also above average in teen marijuana use. It ranks 22nd in the nation for marijuana usage by kids age 12-17.

Students often believe it is not dangerous to drive while under the influence of marijuana. In reality, marijuana affects your ability to make quick decisions, an essential skill on the road.

"Anytime your judgment is impaired, you can't respond when you need to make a quick decision" Reuter said.

Much like liquor, marijuana makes it difficult to "track" on the road, which means staying in the correct lane during curves and turns.

Hookah, which has grown in popularity in recent years, is believed by many to be a healthier option than cigarettes or marijuana. According to the Bacchus Network, this is untrue.

Shisha, the tobacco smoked from a hookah, still contains the cancer-causing materials as any other tobacco, and still contains addictive nicotine.

Hookah smoke also contains 36 times more tar and 15 times more carbon monoxide than a cigarette. It also has more arsenic, lead and nickel.

While most students wouldn't consider alcohol a drug, its effects can be fatal; alcohol killed 5,000 people under the age of 21 in 2009, according to the National Institute of Health.

"We consider anything a person can put in their body to change body or mind a drug," Reuter said.

Most students know that excessive alcohol can cause heart failure, brain shrinkage and cancer.

Still, nearly half of all high school students have drunk alcohol in the last month, with students blowing more than \$19 billion a year at the liquor store, according to Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

At least 25 million Americans will get behind the wheel while intoxicated this year. Worldwide, 29 million children will light their first cigarette. And the World Health Organization says at least 140,000 people will die as a result of those choices.

If students experience symptoms of substance abuse or dependence, or notice classmates who do, steps to aide them are available. Reuter's advice is to talk to them about it and be kind.

"Don't be surprised if they deny it," she said. "Don't enable them and seek support."

"They're people trying to cope with their life the best way they know how. People dealing with drug and alcohol consumption deserve compassion; they are fighting a hard battle." ■

DEPENDENCE OR ABUSE?

A pattern of substance use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress, as manifested by **one or more** of the following in a 12-month period:

SUBSTANCE DEPENDENCE

- a. substance use resulting in a failure to fulfill obligations at work, school, or home
- b. recurrent substance use in physically hazardous situations
- c. substance-related legal problems
- d. continued substance use despite having persistent or recurrent social or interpersonal problems

A pattern of substance use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress, as manifested by **three or more** of the following in a 12-month period:

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

- a. tolerance and withdrawal
- b. substance taken in larger amounts or over longer period of time
- c. persistent desire or unsuccessful efforts to cut down or control use
- d. a great deal of time is spent in activities necessary to obtain the substance
- e. important social, occupational, or recreational activities are given up or reduced because of use
- f. the substance use is continued despite knowledge of having a persistent or recurrent physical or psychological problems

Source: American Psychological Association

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