

Menace of Meth

Seize the Day

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by Michelle Miron
Managing Editor

Last week a Forest Lake High School student was arrested on a felony third-degree drug charge. The female student from Lino Lakes was found to have meth-amphetamine in her purse.

Officials said the arrest marked the first time a Forest Lake student was found to have meth while on school grounds. But it's still disturbing, since I don't want my kids anywhere near the insidious stuff.

In some respects, the prevalence of meth is old news. Some reports since 2005 indicate that a better public awareness and focused attempts by law officials have been successful in reducing the problem.

Still, in a 2002 to 2005 study by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Minnesota ranked third (3.8 percent) in rate of meth usage among young adults aged 18 to 25. Only Wyoming and Arkansas were higher. Nationwide, the same study showed that an estimated 1.4 million people (0.6% of the population) aged 12 or older had used methamphetamine during that time period.

Meth use is a significant problem near my hometown in southwestern Michigan. It's a scary drug on many different levels.

The Web site of Minnesota Attorney General Lori Swanson refers to meth as "the most dangerous drug available". Here are some of its most alarming aspects:

- "Young people are particularly vulnerable to the drug, in part because they are unaware of its destructive effects. Young people may be drawn to meth to stay awake, for all-night partying or studying. Others may try the drug because they think it may help them lose weight."
- "Experts estimate that as many as 70 to 80 percent of people who use meth may become addicted after their first or second use." The Web site About.alcoholism.com notes that in animals, a single high dose has been shown to damage nerve terminals in the dopamine-containing regions of the brain.
- "While other chemical addictions can be treated with conventional 28-day programs, meth addiction is so strong that even a casual user can take up to eight months of being clean before their brain chemistry allows them to move beyond the wall of depression that drives many users back to meth. "
- "Meth users soon lose the ability to experience pleasure on their own. Treatment experts compare the symptoms of serious meth users to schizophrenia, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, stroke and epilepsy. Meth can cause psychotic behavior, brain damage, sores, acne, self-mutilation...depression, anxiety, fatigue, paranoia, aggression, intense cravings, delusions, hallucinations, kidney damage, lung problems, intestinal problems, heart failure, shaking, insomnia, and convulsions." The drug is also extremely destructive to tooth enamel.
- "Meth is poison — literally. Meth is made from poisons such as antifreeze, fertilizer, drain cleaner, batteries, starter fluid, formaldehyde and other serious toxins." For that reason, contamination of places that have housed meth labs is of growing concern, according to <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov>. People who unknowingly move into a home or stay in lodgings that have been used as meth labs could expose themselves and their children to such toxins.

In short, meth is nothing to experiment with. If you haven't scared your kids away from meth already, show them these facts. I know they scared me.

Michelle Miron can be reached at 651-407-1226 or shellmiron@presspubs.com.

relief somehow, until such time as their underlying issues are addressed.

As a result, we spend far too much time addressing the symptoms and almost no time addressing the cause. People who are generally satisfied with their own self-image and perception of life might experiment with drugs, but that's it - that's where it ends. That group represents about 90% of society in general. It's roughly the same percentage of people who are able to use alcohol without negative physical, psychological, or social consequences. That's the way it breaks down today, and frankly, that's always the way it's been.

The population we should be targeting are those who are at odds with their self-image and self-esteem, those who have a negative perception and experience of life who seek continued relief and avoidance of their issues through drugs and alcohol until they become physically and psychologically dependent. That's when their "solution to the problem," becomes the "problem." In all my years of experience, I know of no one who sat down and made a deliberate decision or choice to become addicted because they didn't see enough public service announcements.

And that's where our efforts should be directed - at that group of people for whom anything is preferable to their current existence. And I'm not entirely sure that society wants to deal with that reality.

Erin Anderson
All Positive Options
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