

Squash The Secret

The mission of our group, **Squash the Secret**, is to **Bring Awareness** among the parents in our community regarding the hidden dangers of heroin/opiate abuse, knowing the visual as well as the subtle signs, the imminent threat to themselves, their family, friends and our society. Another aspect of our mission is **Education** in order to save lives, so that our children and loved ones are not taken from us by surprise. To teach and educate that **Addiction is a Disease** and it should never go unnoticed. The ultimate result will be **Prevention** so that another life is not lost or harmed, our children are able to live a fulfilling life, and to keep the disease contained to the fullest extent possible.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS OF SQUASH THE SECRET

Gregg B. Woife

My son Justin began experimenting with alcohol at the age of 15, as do many young adults in the Voorhees and surrounding communities. I became an advocate for the township regarding alcohol abuse and underage drinking. I was successful in having Superintendent Melleby send to all Eastern High School parents a letter regarding the dangers of underage drinking. Justin, however, had difficulties remaining in the same college due to his behavior. His grades were good, but we could not understand why he was exhibiting aberrant behavior. I was informed in 2012 that my son became addicted to Percocet and later learned upon his demise that he was addicted to heroin for at least a year and a half prior, which began with Percocet and Oxycontin abuse during his freshman year of college. It is my goal and intention to forge ahead regarding HIPAA awareness for mental disorders as well as addiction, and to bring awareness, education and prevention of opiate abuse to our community. I have testified before a Congressional Subcommittee this year regarding changing the HIPAA laws for mental disorders and addiction.

Vivian Bush

Addiction has been in my family since a child. My father was an alcoholic and my cousin who lived in the same household had a drug addiction since the age of 13 years old. More recently, Justin, who was like my stepson, became addicted to Percocet and Oxycontin his freshman year of college unbeknownst to our family. It was later discovered upon his demise that he was addicted to snorting heroin for a year and a half prior to his death. I am very aware of the frustration and challenges of rehabilitation and the destruction that occurs within the family unit. The focus, in my opinion, should be on the prevention and the community awareness that is desperately required in order to bring about any meaningful assistance to halt this epidemic.

Susan D'Ambrosio

Mission Statement

I am a parent of a child who passed away from a heroin overdose on 2/12/10 at the age of 19. My Son, Mark, started using marijuana at the age of 14 and within a five year period his addiction progressed to cocaine and pills and then heroin which ultimately took his life.

My goal of this new program is all about prevention – helping parents and their kids be informed of the dangers of drug use. I have written and self-published a book titled, "Why My Son," in 2011 which shows how a beautiful life was taken by this horrible disease of drug addiction. I have spoken at a retreat, an outpatient rehab, and at a parent meeting at Williamstown High School. I will be continuing to speak at schools as I am on a mission to try to prevent this aggressive drug abuse going on. I have also appeared as an advocate for the Good Samaritan Law in my town of Voorhees to get the vote from the committee to veto the wait on this very important bill that was to be signed in effect by Chris Christie. After receiving the vote from surrounding towns, the Good Samaritan Law is now in effect, which I have been told was needed as it is already saving many lives.

Things to be discussed with parents would be giving them ideas on things to look out for if they notice changes in their child that they feel is of concern, and for kids, I would discuss the consequences of poor choices.

What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Heroin Abuse?

Heroin produces a “downer” effect that rapidly induces a state of relaxation and euphoria (related to chemical changes in the pleasure centers of the brain). Like other opiates, heroin use blocks the brain’s ability to perceive pain. Heroin abusers, particularly those with prior history of drug abuse, may initially be able to conceal signs and symptoms of their heroin use.

Loved ones or co-workers may notice a number of signs of heroin use, which are visible during and after heroin consumption:

- Shortness of breath
- Dry mouth
- Constricted (small) pupils
- Sudden changes in behavior or actions
- Disorientation
- Cycles of hyper alertness followed by suddenly nodding off
- Droopy appearance, as if extremities are heavy

The above signs are not unique to heroin abuse. More definitive warning signs of heroin abuse include possession of paraphernalia used to prepare, inject or consume heroin:

- Needles or syringes not used for other medical purposes
- Burned silver spoons
- Aluminum foil or gum wrappers with burn marks
- Missing shoelaces (used as a tie off for injection sites)
- Straws with burn marks
- Small plastic bags, with white powdery residue
- Water pipes or other pipe

Behavioral signs of heroin abuse and addiction include:

- Lying or other deceptive behavior
- Avoiding eye contact, or distant field of vision
- Substantial increases in time spent sleeping
- Increase in slurred, garbled or incoherent speech
- Sudden worsening of performance in school or work, including expulsion or loss of jobs
- Decreasing attention to hygiene and physical appearance
- Loss of motivation and apathy toward future goals
- Withdrawal from friends and family, instead spending time with new friends with no natural tie
- Lack of interest in hobbies and favorite activities
- Repeatedly stealing or borrowing money from loved ones, or unexplained absence of valuables
- Hostile behaviors toward loved ones, including blaming them for withdrawal or broken commitments
- Regular comments indicating a decline in self esteem or worsening body image

- Wearing long pants or long sleeves to hide needle marks, even in very warm weather

Users build tolerance to heroin, leading to increases in the frequency and quantity of heroin consumption. With growing tolerance, more definitive physical symptoms of heroin abuse and addiction emerge:

- Weight loss
- Runny nose (not explained by other illness or medical condition)
- Needle track marks visible on arms
- Infections or abscesses at injection site
- For women, loss of menstrual cycle (amenorrhea)
- Cuts, bruises or scabs from skin picking

HOW CAN WE HELP PARENT OF OUR YOUNG CHILDREN?

1. Explain the Signs and Symptoms of Heroin/Opiate Use.
2. Notice the change within your child both physically and emotionally
3. Change in their behavior
4. Change in their friends, who they hang out with socially
5. Anxiety, Depression, ADD, ADHD
6. School grades are inconsistent, declining grade point average
7. Detention, Suspension from School
8. Withdrawn, No interaction or very little interaction with parents and relatives
9. Never think, "This can't happen to my child"
10. Parents must lock up all drugs and alcohol under lock and key
11. Partner with Drug Free America. Please check out the website
12. Parents believe their child's behavior is altering when, in fact, it is addiction
13. Urine Test your child when suspect and MUST be present for the test
14. If there are any visible signs, do not trust. Addiction is manipulation, lying and deceit
15. Child is easily irritable, snappy when questioned, defensive, paranoid, hypersensitive
16. Genetic predisposition
17. Addiction is a disease, not a moral issue
18. Child stays out very late or all night
19. Becomes reclusive
20. Nodding out and exhibits euphoria
21. Stealing, missing items within the home, selling his/her personal belongings
22. Changes in their interests
23. Laying around, little or no drive
24. Behavioral signs come before the physical signs
25. Beware of pharm parties
26. Little to no eye contact when conversing
27. Consistently quits jobs, sports, activities

DISCUSSIONS PARENTS CAN HAVE WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

- 1. The dangers of using drugs**
- 2. Alcohol and drug education, both legal, prescription and illegal drugs.**
- 3. Have addicts or recovering addicts interact with children for educational purposes**
- 4. Convince the child that they can come and confide in you and you are there to assist them**
- 5. Teach your child an escape mechanism to leave a party or an uncomfortable situation**
- 6. Teach your child to be a leader, to be honest and to not follow bad role models**
- 7. Choose your friends wisely, not unsavory characters**
- 8. Teach prevention and intervention**
- 9. Make sure they stay focused in school**
- 10. Have them interact and be involved in extracurricular activities**
- 11. Education them on all drugs, including prescription, illegal, huffing, whippets and other substances which are life-threatening**
- 12. Make them aware of the dangers of drugs and alcohol**
- 13. Teach your child responsibility**
- 14. Have them play a sport or get a job to keep busy in addition to their school work**
- 15. Communication is critical**

The Program that Squash the Secret is offering is Parental, Staff and Student Education, as indicative of our Mission Statement. The Resources that our group will offer the parents is Drug-Free America, Partnership at Drug-Free.org, Steered Straight.org, Living Proof Recovery Center in Voorhees and the web site, Justinforjustice.org, among others that we will promote in the future based on further research.