

Life Talk® News 18

Please forward to everyone who might be interested

(If you can't see the Tug-of-Life graphic below, please click on the small red cross) ©Izabella Gates



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DRUGS: URGENT ALERT FOR PARENTS!

WHY IS IT VITAL FOR YOU TO BE AWARE OF WHAT'S HAPPENING?

(written by Izabella Little Gates)

Reports flooding into the Life Talk Forum in recent months are ringing major alarm bells about what's happening in terms of drug use by our children. Before you're tempted to shrug it off because "it won't happen to my child" I implore you to read on.

Many of us feel that we know all about drugs and how bad they are. But do we really? Do we regularly speak with our children about the facts, dangers, side-effects and consequences? Do we tell them about the physical and mental damage, and not just the danger of addiction? Do we set the right example for our families? If we're doing all this, then what we're doing isn't working!

It's not working at schools, and even more so at universities. It's not working in the most affluent areas and in the poorest ones too. Based on the stories shared with us, the reality is that:

- Ever more adolescents (and children) are smoking marijuana/weed/dagga. In poorer communities the starting age can be as young as 5, while in affluent schools 'weed' is popular from grade 9 onwards, and becomes increasingly so as the years go by.
- Huffing (the inhaling of household or other chemicals to achieve a 'high') continues to grow in popularity in spite of some well-publicized deaths.
- Ritalin and other medicines including headache tablets are being snorted, smoked and traded on school playgrounds and university campuses.
- We keep hearing about new cases of schizophrenia among teens and young adults - and upon investigation many of these have been attributed to dagga-smoking. Professor Lourens Schlebusch (internationally recognized authority on psychotic disorders as well as suicide prevention) confirms the very real dangers of smoking dagga. He speaks of cannabis intoxication, psychosis, schizophrenia and amotivational syndrome as just some of the identified risks of smoking dagga/marijuana. "If only we'd known we would never have smoked it" is a common refrain among those who learnt the hard way....
- A few years ago, feedback indicated that many 1st year students smoked weed and by the time they were in 3rd/4th year it was hard to find students who weren't smoking. Now the feedback from many campuses is that most of the 1st years are smoking weed, and by 3rd/4th year it's the majority and it's no longer just weed but also pills (MDMA/Ecstasy), 'shrooms, cocaine, heroin or a variety of cocktail drugs.
- "It's so common now, if I only want to have friends who never try drugs I wouldn't have any friends" is a statement that defines the chilling reality in universities and colleges. And it's so common that many parents accept it as the 'norm'. How crazy is that?! How can we ever accept drug-use as "being the norm"?

Accept this "norm" or fight back?

When it comes to drugs we are facing one of the most dangerous of Challengers in our "tug-

of-parenting". (See *the Tug-of-Life* for a comprehensive list of the other challenges currently facing teens, young adults and parents).

Our children can never be considered to be 100% safe from the vicious clutches of drugs, and if we don't realize that we could inadvertently be setting them up for learning this themselves in the very hardest of ways. So what do we do? What role are **you** prepared to play?

What's happening with our children – and why?

Our Life Talk team has just undertaken an investigative exercise to identify some of the factors driving the drug-related behaviour. We spoke to a number of university students (if anyone ought to be bright enough to understand the risks it's this group) and here are some of the answers we got to our questions:

1. **"We don't know the true facts about drugs"**. Hard to believe, but this is a message we're repeatedly hearing! What about the hours spent in Life Orientation, and listening to ex-drug-addicts as they recount how drugs destroyed their lives? It seems that most kids sit through these lessons/talks but the voice in their own heads is saying "I'll never be like that... All I do is smoke weed so I'll never be a heroin addict or prostitute like he/she is describing". When we said "What about the health risks and side-effects, schizophrenia, depression etc?" the reply was "We've never been told about those risks – we were only ever told that we would become heroin addicts living on the streets but when we look at others who are OK we know that's not true – so no-one ever told us the real dangers..."
2. **"It won't happen to me"**. This is the prevailing argument by students who are using drugs. This belief shuts out all information and shrugs off any kind of thought about possible consequences.
3. **"There's no drive for kids to succeed nowadays"**. Whoa! Where did this one come from? Food-for-thought answers came from affluent kids as well as those from poorer communities.
 - a. Answers from the affluent lot include: "Your generation grew up needing to succeed. Your parents had a tougher life, many lived through the war and lost a lot, and many had it tough anyway, so you had to work hard to get the things you wanted. We have it easy, we've got everything we need, a good education and material stuff, so why should we try hard? What's the point of wasting life on working when we've got what we need? Life is about having fun and a good party, so if booze or drugs can make it more fun when you're out, why not?". Phew, that's telling it like it is! How did their parents' hard work and efforts backfire like this?
 - b. Answers from the poorer community include: "What's the point of trying hard? Look at how tough life is so let's just have fun and not worry about anything. Drugs can make your problems go away for a while..."
4. **"Others are doing it and they're OK"**. And more: "At school teachers and parents tried to scare us about how drugs would destroy us but now we see our mates using them and having fun, and they're seemingly OK so why shouldn't we try too? Sure, some kids get ill or die, but only a few and it won't happen to us".
5. **"YOLO (you only live once)"**. Dubbed "*carpe diem* for idiots" this approach is all the rage and it's being used to justify any stupid behaviour. Example: mate 1 "Hey, I heard you got drunk and crashed your folks' car, aren't they mad at you?"; mate 2 "Yeah, but YOLO so what the heck, it was a fun night!". Yeah, right!
6. **"My folks smoke pot and snort coke so why shouldn't I?"**. We're increasingly hearing this type of comment, across all communities. The drug might differ, but the message is the same: the role models provided by many parents encourage the youth to follow too.
7. **"Drugs are cheap now, anyone can afford them"**. Scary, but only too true...
8. **"Kids nowadays don't have discipline - and we're not focused on consequences"**. The explanation: "Life is about having fun, and parents want to be their kids' friends, so there aren't many consequences when we break the rules. Then at varsity we have even more freedom and because most kids haven't been taught to think of consequences they just go crazy experimenting with anything that sounds like fun.

If we don't 'tug', the drug Challengers will win!

The longer we sit on the fence or 'do the ostrich', the more of our children will fall prey to the drugs' pull. There's no 'maybe' here – it's happening right now and there are no signs of a

turnaround. No one knows which child will manage to dabble with the occasional drug and still be OK, and which one will end up a schizophrenic, fighting depression or become addicted to heroin or cocaine.

Did you yourself once take the odd puff, snort or hit, and are you OK now? Just because you're OK doesn't mean your child will be if he or she tries the same stuff. Not only is each person's profile different, but many of the drugs are different too. Marijuana hybrids are much stronger than before and cocktails of drugs have frightening effects on many. A young guy I know pops a number of E's every weekend and he seems to be 'OK', but his friend had one and ended up in a coma and is now brain-damaged. Either of them could be your child and you'll only know which one when it happens...

Do you think that just because your child goes to a top school, he or she will be safe from the threat of drugs? Not so. Of the hundreds and hundreds of tragic stories we hear, a huge percentage are about children who come from supposedly 'good families', a 'good' upbringing, and top schools. Drugs don't differentiate – anyone from the poorest to the wealthiest is a possible target.

So what are we going to do? What will you do??

We are facing a crisis and if we continue to 'do the ostrich' the repercussions could be devastating for our younger generation. This is a 'tug-of-war' at its most powerful. And it's not enough to rely on the government or schools to do something. If we as parents don't stand up and take action then nothing meaningful will happen.

So what do we do and where do we start? The drug-taking behaviour is a symptom of some hefty underlying causes – so we now HAVE to address ourselves to the causes. And we cannot do it alone in isolation. We have to get these conversations going in every household and family, in every school and organisation, in the media and government.

We need to take an in-depth look at what's happening and at what needs to change. In 'Tug-of-Life-speak' we have to clearly identify the Challengers and Ch-izers, we need to understand the Factors and we then need to harness every Galvanizer that will help us to achieve our objectives.

Life Talk is committed to doing everything we possibly can to address what's happening. Would you like to join us?

We have to start with our own children and families, and then we have to take the messages to schools, universities, communities, corporates and throughout society.

If we are to beat powerful Challengers such as drugs, we have to galvanize teens, young adults and parents into action. Ultimately we have to galvanize the whole of society into doing some things differently.

The Tug-of-Life is about identifying what's happening and why, and it's about identifying choices, consequences and solutions. It's about getting key conversations going and about taking action to change some of the destructive behaviour patterns.

If you're keen to start 'tugging' for what counts, sign up to Tug-of-Life on our website, join our Facebook discussions and spread the messages among everyone you know.

DRINK-SPIKING ON THE INCREASE

We've recently seen an alarming increase in the number of reported drink-spiking incidents. In some instances whole groups of girls at clubs and parties have reportedly had their drinks spiked. Many of them become terribly ill and some end up in a coma. It's essential to keep talking to our kids about this danger, and to stress the importance of never leaving a drink unattended – and to watch for anyone acting suspiciously.

Sometimes all it takes is for someone at a restaurant or party to sweep his arm over a glass and squeeze a couple of drops of GHB (gamma hydroxy butarate) or some other date rape drug, often stored in eyedrop bottles, into one's glass. We also recently heard from a parent who had attended a very upmarket party where the host spiked someone's drink, so it's an activity that seems to have no boundaries.

QOOH.ME: DANGEROUS OR FUN?

www.Qooh.me is a website that's causing concern among parents. It is a site where anyone can ask any questions in anonymity. Its intentions might be fun, but we have reports of children engaging in Q & A sessions with strangers who extract personal information and

engage in explicit discussions. If you have any feedback please do let us know!

ALCOHOL: AVAILABILITY & EFFECTS

A number of schools have asked us to alert parents about the availability of alcohol at clubs, and restaurants. Many of these venues do not ask for proof of age and they are happily selling alcohol to underage children. Many of these adolescents drink regularly and large quantities.

RECENT RESEARCH SHOWS ALCOHOL'S DRASTIC EFFECTS ON YOUNG BRAINS:

Essential information about alcohol's effects on the teen brain are available at: <http://www.childmag.co.za/content/sobering-truths#.UCtcd1L-64Y.email>

NEW: UPDATED LIFE TALK BOOKS!

The bestselling Life Talk series has been updated by Izabella Little-Gates and she has added 15 essential new chapters and topics.

Life Talk for a Daughter, *Life Talk for a Son* and *Life Talk for Parents* now include many of the recent activities that teens and young adults are engaging in, and they cover other issues being faced by adolescents. In addition to the previous 60 topics, the books now include: Hubbly-bubbles; Binge-drinking; Cyberbullying; Dagga/weed-smoking; Cocktail drugs; Staying safe on the Internet; Choking games; Huffing; Drink-spiking; Child-headed households; Gangs; Peer pressure; and more.

Izabella has received thousands of emails from teens and parents from around the world, and many of them attribute life-changing experiences to specific chapters in the books. **Get your copy today! And get a copy of *The Tug-of-Life* too.**

Available at bookstores and on www.lifetalk.co.za

The Tug-of-Life is also available on Kindle (www.amazon.com)

WATCH VIDEOS ON www.lifetalk.co.za

Following huge demand for Life Talk's information and talks, we are excited to announce that we are posting a series of short video clips on our website. The videos address many of the key issues and challenges being faced by teens, young adults and parents. We upload a new video every two weeks, so click on our website regularly to see the latest tips

www.lifetalk.co.za & www.tugoflife.com

THE LIFE TALK TEAM & INITIATIVES

We often get asked about Life Talk and our team so here's some background:

Life Talk Forum is a Section 21 non-profit organisation. Sally Thorp heads up the Gauteng initiatives, Suzie Linstrom runs the Cape and Izabella Gates (aka Izabella Little the author of the Life Talk books) is now based in Hillcrest KZN. Dominique Little handles all the multi-media and produces (films and stars in) the videos.

We rely on sponsorship and book sales for our funding. Some of our initiatives include:

Table Tuesdays – encouraging families to share mealtimes, away from the TV and cell phones. We've had amazing feedback about enhanced communication and we've even heard about a marriage that was saved by it!

SpeakUp! – a peer-education programme to reduce alcohol-related harm among teens. It is run in conjunction with Khulisa and SANCA and involves sessions with teens, parents and educators.

Tug-of-Life – the awareness-building 'call to action' mentioned earlier, underpinned by Izabella's entertaining new book *the Tug-of-Life*.

Sponsored talks – corporates sponsor our Facilitators to give talks and hand out books at disadvantaged schools.

NEWSLETTERS 1 – 17 COVERED: huffing; clubs; Facebook guide for parents; a drug dealer's alert to parents; cell phones; teen drinking; pocket money; hubbly

bubbly; chewing tobacco; fake IDs; communication; discipline & boundaries; depression; Grade 8 hiccups; promiscuous activity; self-mutilation; eating disorders; self-esteem; bullying; abuse; ADHD; EMO; subject choices; MXit; divorce; ice-spiking with 'eye drops', head injuries; cults; chat-rooms; child-trafficking; cyberbullying, choking games and many others. (You can download them for free off: www.lifetalk.co.za)

HOW DO YOU BECOME A GALVANIZER IN THE TUG-OF-LIFE?

- a. **If you're not already a Life Talk subscriber, sign-up now** (free) on www.lifetalk.co.za .
- b. **Forward this email** to every parent, grandparent, educator and any potentially interested person you know – and encourage them to join.
- c. **Invite any high-profile people you may know** (media, business, government, religious leaders, or others) to lend their support to the initiative.
- d. **Display posters, get discussions going, read *The Tug-of-Life***
- e. **See our website for other ways of being involved.**
- f. Join us on **Facebook Life Talk Tug-of-War and Facebook TugOfLife**
- g. Follow us on **Twitter @TugOfLife**

HOW WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM JOINING?

- Joining the initiative will help you to be proactive in preparing your children for the challenges of adolescence (and adulthood);
- You'll receive current information and advice;
- You'll unleash your power (replacing worry and helplessness with action/results);
- You'll become part of building a society where values, positive attitudes and successful choices are part of our youth's future.

TELL EVERYONE ABOUT IT – GET THEM TO JOIN!

TO SUBSCRIBE TO THE FORUM (FOR FREE):

Click on **FORUM** on www.lifetalk.co.za and enter the details. If you'd like past newsletters, you can download them off the **FORUM** page.

FUNDING FOR THE FORUM?

If you or your organisation would like to sponsor any of the Forum or Tug-of-Life activities, your help would be invaluable! Please contact us on Action@lifetalk.co.za.

Specific aspects can be sponsored (eg talks, posters, flyers, books) or extra Facilitators can be sponsored to roll out the initiatives in other centres.

**PLEASE FORWARD THIS NEWSLETTER TO EVERYONE
ACTION TODAY CHANGES TOMORROW!**

The **FORUM** email address is: forum@lifetalk.co.za

(Information is provided in good faith and Life Talk's representatives take no responsibility for any consequent actions arising therefrom.)

The Life Talk® Forum is endorsed by:
**FAMSA, the CIE, the ARA, SANCA, Khulisa Social Solutions
Retrouvaille, Johannesburg Parent and Child Counselling Centre,
ISASA (Independent Schools Association) and many schools and other
organisations**

For more about *the Tug-of-Life* and *Life Talk*® initiatives and books, or the Forum visit:

www.lifetalk.co.za

***Life Talk for a Daughter* and *Life Talk for a Son* are a toolkit of tips and guidelines for teens and**

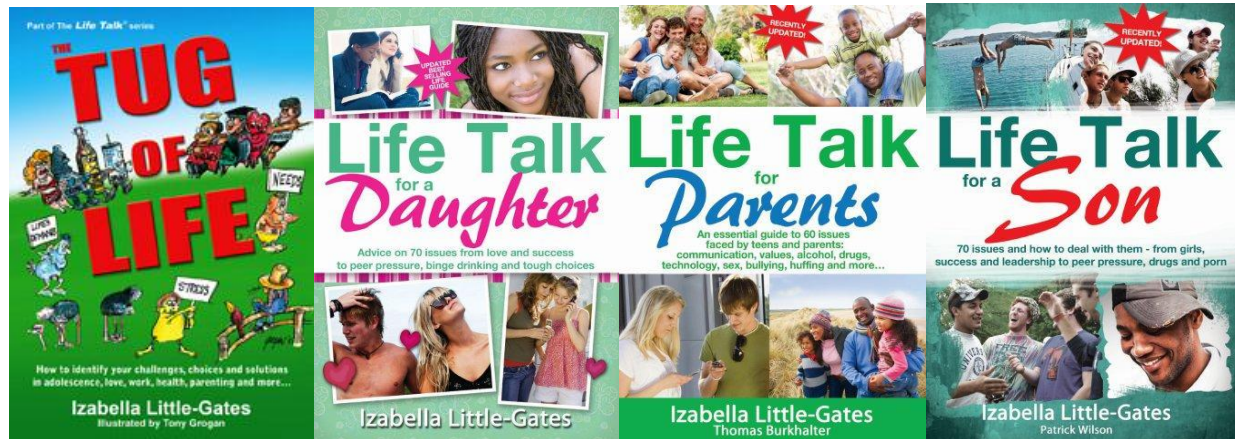
young adults.

Life Talk for Parents is a guide to all the issues faced by parents and teens, and it explores solutions and key areas to focus on.

The Tug-of-Life helps you to define your game plan for life by identifying your challenges, choices and solutions, in adolescence, work, marriage, parenting and other aspects.

The books make a great gift and are available at most bookstores, on www.lifetalk.co.za www.kalahari.net, and internationally in: UK, Portugal, Spain and China as well as in Arabic

****Proceeds fund the Forum****



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Bulk orders can be emailed to: forum@lifetalk.co.za

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