

**Session Topic:** Abuse (Drugs/Alcohol in the Family)

**Developmental Level:** Middle School

**Purpose:** To discuss how substance use can be a familial pattern; to analyze their own reasons for using alcohol or drugs

**Materials Needed:** pens or pencils

**Description of Session:**

1. Ask the group to think of one thing that runs in their family (height, eye color, athleticism, good at math, love music). Write these things on the board.
2. Explain that other things run in families too - problems can go from generation to generation. What are some family problems that can go from generation to generation (Imprisonment, drug and alcohol abuse, anger problems, child abuse). Say that unless you make a real decision not to follow these cycles, you are at a greater risk for getting involved in these kinds of family problems yourself. The starting place is to first see that chain.
3. Ask how a person feels if they live with an addict, have domestic violence in their house, have a parent abandon the family, or have a parent go to jail? Write on the board.
4. Introduce family roles. Say that in a lot of these households, there tends to be distinct roles that family members play.
  - Enabler - covers for the user, seems responsible and capable but inside feels hurt and angry, lets him continue using by saving him, feels loyal to the person and thinks they are helping to "fix" things
  - Hero - stays out of trouble, follows the rules, tries to erase shame by being a high achiever, on the outside seems perfect, on the inside might feel inadequate, scared or bad about self
  - Scapegoat - acts out feelings by fighting, stealing, vandalizing, using drugs, might be called names like "rotten egg" or "the rebel", has a history of being suspended or expelled and may quit before finishing high school. Often looks angry but inside has intense feelings of pain, sadness, loneliness, takes a lot of the focus away from substance-abusing parent.
  - Lost Child - not sure what is going on around him or her, but knows it is probably unhealthy or dangerous. Feels like an outsider and keeps a low profile to protect himself, takes care of himself and doesn't rely on anyone for help. Withdraws from everyone. Often seems 'forgotten' by other members of the family because isn't demanding. Main feeling they have is loneliness. Don't have a lot of friends.
  - Mascot - takes the tension away from family by making jokes or acting silly. Often hyperactive and easily distracted. May have a hard time focusing in school because they are so restless and nervous. Sometimes jokes around and acts silly and cute, but can sometimes be annoying and disruptive.
5. Ask the students if they identify with any of the roles you discussed. How does this serve the family? How do other people treat them? Is this how they really see themselves?
6. On the board, write two columns: one that says "My Parents Straight", the other "My Parents Stoned or High". Ask the students to give you examples for the following categories underneath each column: The things they say, the things they do, the way they look, how I feel about them, how I feel about myself (example included)
7. Tie in parents' substance abuse with if they have tried alcohol or drugs. Read Latrell's story: *The first time I started using drugs was in the 7th grade. A lot of my friends was smoking marijuana so it*

*seemed kinda normal to me. I guess I did it because I felt like no one in my family loved or trusted me. My parents never asked me about school or how I'm doing. I used the drugs to relax my mind so I don't have to think too much about what is wrong with my life.*

8. Ask if that story sounds familiar. Have the students think back to the first time they used. How old were you? Who were you with? Were you with friends or alone? What was going on at the time? Do you remember the mood you were in? Did using match your expectations?

**Discussion questions:**

1. What stood out to you the most about group today?
2. Why do you think family patterns repeat themselves, positive and negative things?
3. How does the knowledge of family roles affect the way you look at your family?

Reference: Casarjian, B and Casarjian R. (2003). *The Power Source Facilitator's Manual*. Boston, MA: The Lionheart Foundation.