

# APPROACH TO YOUNG ADULTS AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Approximately 60% of Benchmark's students have been involved with a variety of illegal substances. We generally classify these students into two categories.

## **THE REGULAR USER - ADDICTED**

Of those students with experience using illegal substances, approximately one third belong to the first and most serious category. These are young men and women who have a history of regular usage. Typically, their parents have been aware (sometimes for a considerable period) of the extent of their usage, which is consistent and may occur on a daily basis. Most of these students' drug histories date back to junior high and high school.

Students in this category most often began with marijuana or alcohol use, and may have progressed onto more serious drugs. Usually, they prefer one drug that becomes their drug of choice, but will use whatever is at hand. If they are serious users, they might have also experimented with other drugs such as cocaine, heroin, LSD, mushrooms or amphetamines.

Often, the profile of the serious user begins with school failure. Some have been identified as special education students. Those students who did not require special services were often capable students until they became consumed by their drug behavior. Other behaviors that often accompany drug usage include: hanging out with peers whom parents identify as potential drug users, lack of motivation and selling drugs to help support their habit.

In approximately 20% of our students, drug usage has contributed to additional illegal activities. Parents report personality changes, broken relationships, inability to trust and a fear of the unknown. By this time, even the most hard-to-convince parent is usually beyond the denial stage and admits a problem.

Coincidentally within this group, approximately 30% of our students have been adopted. However, if they are genetically related, parents often report other family members/extended family members have displayed signs of addiction, as well.

Should we determine that a student fits into our first category, we take steps for rehabilitation. This will include entering an out-patient program. If the student requires more intensive rehabilitation, we will place them in one of our partner in-patient programs, for the duration of 45-60 days. Parents will be consulted if in-patient rehabilitation is warranted.

## **THE CASUAL USER - NOT YET ADDICTED**

The second group truly seems to have fewer problems with regard to the use of substances. Parents generally report that they have never seen them high, nor have they come home drunk. They often have information that their son/daughter has experimented with marijuana or alcohol. Rarely have they been exposed to anything else. They usually know the whereabouts of their adult child and feel certain that this has not developed into much of a problem. Rather, these parents stress other issues such as their adult child's learning disorders, traumas that may have happened along the way, or other long-standing social and emotional problems that have developed.

We rely upon our own assessment regarding each student, which includes a written questionnaire. This helps us to judge the severity of usage. Prior reports from other professionals can be helpful in determining our direction upon entry.

If the student appears to fit the category for the not yet addicted, he or she will be immersed in our own recovery program. This includes working the 12-Steps of AA/NA and attending sobriety meetings (both on and off campus). Living a clean and sober existence is essential to their success.