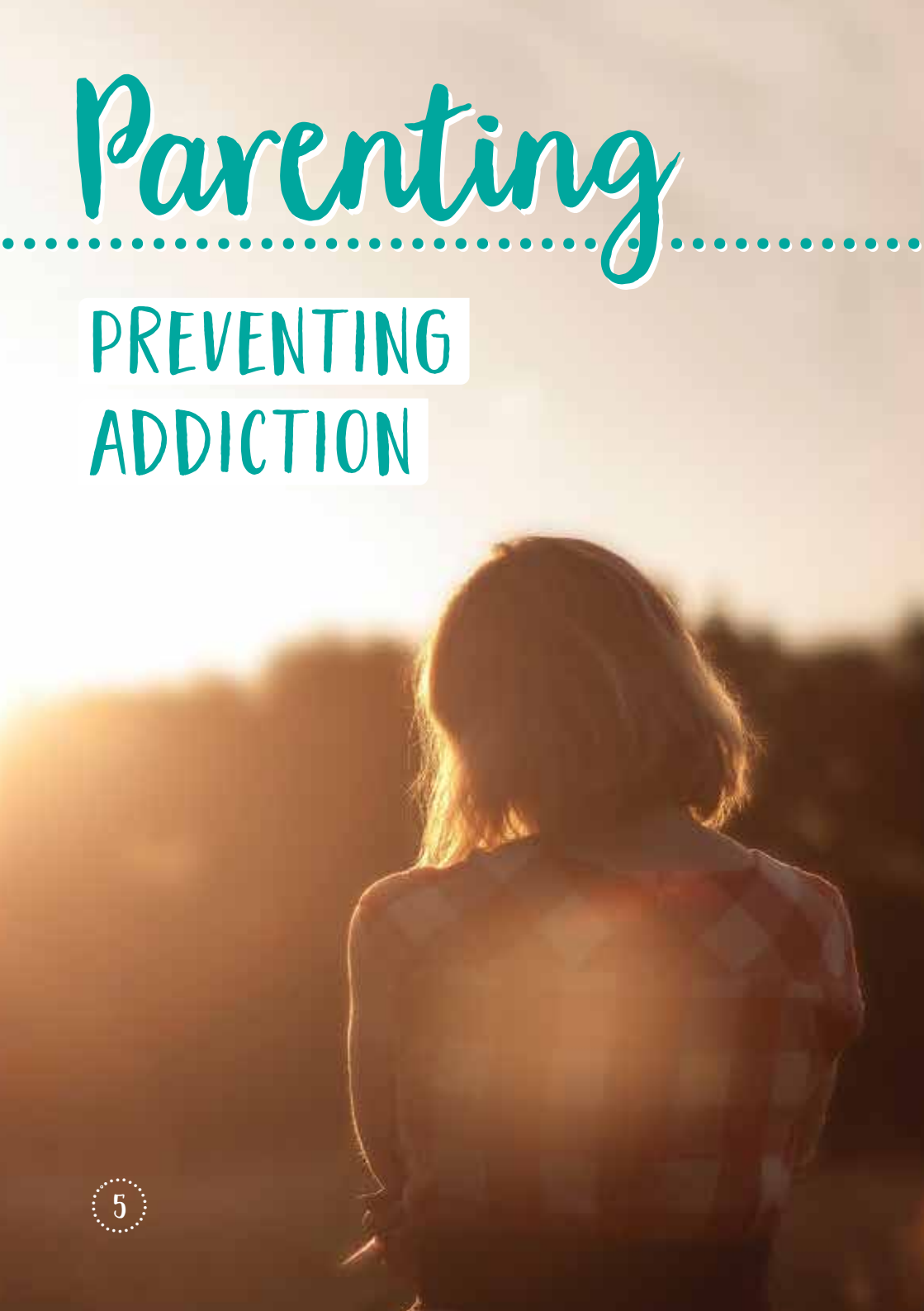


# Parenting

A person with long, wavy hair is seen from behind, looking out at a bright sunset or sunrise over a field. The person is wearing a red and white checkered shirt. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a strong lens flare and illuminating the scene with a warm, golden light. The background is a soft-focus landscape with trees and fields.

## PREVENTING ADDICTION

It's a major concern  
for parents.

When they're not  
worrying about  
their children being  
beaten up or robbed,  
they're worried  
about drugs.



# Why do people do drugs?

For many reasons:

## 1. RECREATIONAL USERS

They're usually young people looking for fun. Some manage to escape addiction, but the vulnerable ones get addicted and go down the tubes amazingly quickly. Why are some people vulnerable? It could be genetic, family example, cultural or they could have an addictive personality.

### Positive alternative

- Educate young people that total avoidance is the only sure way of protecting someone who's vulnerable (which may be you).
- Give opportunities for fun and natural highs.

## 2. REBELLIOUS USERS

Adolescents often try drugs so they will be accepted by their peer group or to try to discover their own identity apart from parents or teachers.

### Positive alternative

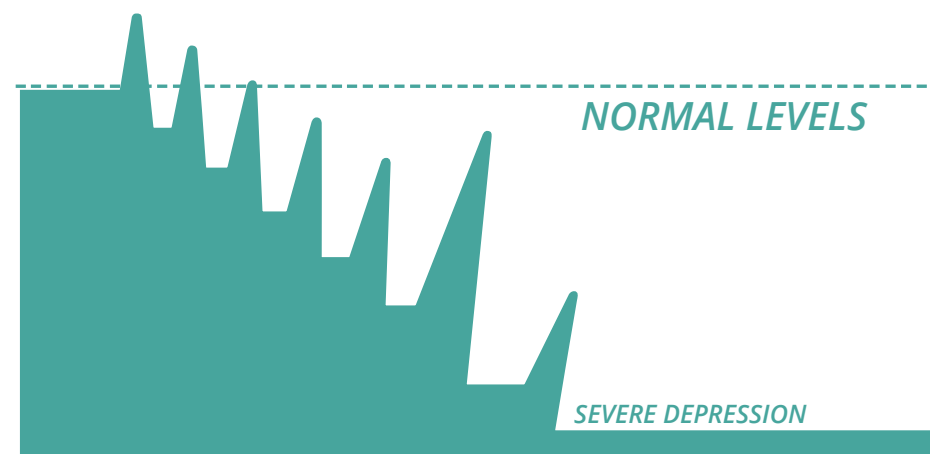
- Try to steer them into a positive peer group and towards other responsible young adults who'll guide them through any phase when they think their parents are stupid.

## 3. MALADJUSTED USERS

These are people, young and old, who are trying to escape bad feelings caused by loneliness, failure, shame, guilt, conflict in relationships (their own or their parents').

### Positive alternative

- Readily available counselling with parents who listen and have built up a quality relationship with them.



Addiction cycle

## 4. EXTREME CASES

These are profoundly disturbed personalities, often addicted to anything and everything. They need psychiatric help or else at least harm minimisation. If a child fits this category, call a social worker fast. Then there are people in painful poverty or racial oppression. They need the chance to meet their primary needs of food and shelter through social and community work. (If only that were as easy as it sounds!).

The thing they all have in common is that they are trying to change their mood—how they feel. If you look at the addiction cycle above, it is a jagged line. It starts flat, then the drug is taken and the person's mood soars up. But then it quickly falls away, ending even lower than it was before. And so they need another drug to get them back up to an acceptable level. Eventually they need the drug to feel normal. Then its effect is lessened and they need more. Eventually even a high dose still does not raise them high enough and they are in serious trouble—that's if they're still alive at all.

In simple terms, addiction is emotional. It's about how you feel. This course will look at what you can do to give your children a strong emotional life so that they don't need drugs.

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**"IN SIMPLE TERMS,  
ADDICTION IS  
EMOTIONAL."**

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## How can you prevent addictions?

There are no guarantees, but the following can vastly improve a child's chances.

### 1. MEET THEIR PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS

"The child's foremost need is an adequate supply of wise love. By 'wise' I mean steady and natural, instead of sporadic and forced; unsentimental and geared to growing autonomy [independence] instead of plaintive [needy and pleading] and smothering," David Roberts, addiction expert (*For more information, see our Parenting course, "The Psychology of Love".*)

### 2. MODEL AND TEACH RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

Addicts tend to be lonely people. They have "drug buddies", who are not real buddies at all. They tend to love only their addiction. So teach your kids how to communicate and connect with people in satisfying ways.

### 3. BUILD SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem is built by positive relationships ("That cool, older person likes me"), affirmations ("Thank you for being an honest boy—you're great like that"), winning attitudes ("I can do it" rather than "What's the use of trying"), achievements and doing useful things.

It can also come from a belief system ("God made me, loves me and has a plan for my life" rather than "I'm a cosmic accident and there's no-one up there to give a toss about me").

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**“THE CHILD’S FOREMOST  
NEED IS AN ADEQUATE  
SUPPLY OF WISE LOVE.”**

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Good self-esteem can handle:

- some faults and limitations in yourself: “You still deserve love.”
- some disapproval from others: “They may be wrong.”
- some periods without a romantic relationship: “They’re great, but I am still a whole person.”
- unfairness in the world: “You won’t always get what you want.”

#### **4. MODEL AND TEACH GOOD STRESS MANAGEMENT**

Many addicts first turned to drugs to escape stressful situations. (Not that drugs help them fix these situations—in fact, they usually make them worse.)

#### **5. TEACH THEM HOW TO HANDLE THEIR EMOTIONS**

The best way is by example. They are watching you. That doesn’t have to be scary. You don’t have to be ashamed of your emotions, or hide them under an unbelievably calm voice and a happy face as though everything is lovely. Just express them appropriately. If you don’t feel confident what that is like, get some tips from a counsellor or a good book.

## Meanwhile, here are some tips on the “big three”

### 1. ANGER

It can be useful for defending ourselves and making us right wrongs, but it can explode into verbal abuse or violence. You can teach children to:

- **Think about why they are angry** before they simply react.
- **Use words, not fists.**
- **Make their feelings heard** in a way that makes them most likely to be understood (whether or not this changes the situation). This means no shouting, swearing, rude demands or verbal abuse. Turn anger into positive statements of what they want.
- **Seek resolution**, not be emotionally or physically threatening.
- **Focus their anger on the right thing:** the source.
- **Stick to the issue.** Don't have a general rage about anything and everything else.

One harmful way to express anger is passive-aggressiveness. You see this in children when they quietly rebel. They are stubborn for no reason—except to frustrate an authority figure. You can acknowledge their feelings while also politely letting them know that their inappropriate behaviour will not change your decision. There is also a form of pseudo-anger: **the tantrum**.

#### Dealing with tantrums:

- **Never let them have any rewards or wins as a result of a tantrum.** If this makes you feel like a horrible person, check your self-esteem. Are you depending too much on the child's approval?
- **Deal with the immediate problem.** It can be hard to walk away when a child is rolling around a shopping centre aisle and 10 people are staring at you like you're a horrible parent. But you only have to do it once before your child knows you mean business. Besides, you don't have to see the other shoppers again.

- **Don't let them get away with it**—give them some punishment afterwards.
- **Some writers suggest you should move first**, going into a “mock charge” before they can, using your most forceful and angry voice. Maybe, but one great teacher I know says too many parents scream at their children and then do nothing, so children learn to discount yelling. She drops her voice and whispers like a hired assassin with no emotions, cool as 007 about to pull the trigger—I've seen angry, undisciplined children feel the fear of Zeus and stop the tantrum!

### B. SADNESS

Sadness is no fun but it can actually be useful—it releases endorphins and removes stress.

How can you help children deal with it?

- **Simply be there as a calm presence.**
- **Acknowledge how they're feeling.** (“Yes, it is sad about your dog, old pal.”)
- **Don't try to stop them too soon.** It's important that boys be allowed to cry without being called a sook. “Jesus wept.” It's the shortest verse in the Bible<sup>1</sup>, but it says a lot. If the Role Model cried, it's OK. (He was crying for a dead friend.)

There is also a form of false sadness: **the sulk**. You don't want them to grow up with this habit! Sulking only works if it makes the parent (or other target) feel guilty. Your first instinct may be to rush in and try to cheer the poor dear up, or try to charm them out of it with your amazing personality. But that only encourages them to sulk again. One brilliant tactic is to say, “I want to help you. When you work out what you want, come and see me,” and then leave. Then the child learns some hard truths:

- That grumping will not change the world.
- That life does not always give us what we want.
- That people will help you only if you ask clearly and nicely for what you want.

### C. FEAR

Fear has its uses too—it can be an inbuilt early warning system. It makes you think hard and move fast. Yet too much fear limits your life. The best way to handle fear is with logical thought and reasoning. Don't poo-poo a child's fears. Listen to them, but then give reasons why their fear will not be a problem, and even logical steps. ("No cars have ever crashed through a house in our street. But if one did, it would be stopped by the stones on the front porch.") If they seem obsessed by a fear, look for the actual cause.

There is a pseudo-fear: shyness. Parenting expert Steve Biddulph suggests that to break the habit, children can be simply told to say hello and use the person's name. A full conversation may be too much to ask. And they certainly should not be forced to hug or kiss someone if they don't want to. It's important to teach them early that they have the right to say no to physical touch. Leave those boundaries intact.

### *An addictive lifestyle?*

I'll never forget a cartoon showing two old guys standing in the pub with a beer and a smoke saying, "I dunno, young people and drugs." You can be addicted to a surprising range of things, many of which are not harmful in themselves.

- **Work.** You get a rush from achievement, but then fatigue drops you even lower.
- **Gambling.** The high comes from winning. The low comes from despair at losing and desperation to get the high again.
- **Shopping.** The high is spending and owning, the low is getting your credit card bill. This low makes some people need to go out to get a high again by more shopping. And so the cycle continues.
- **Internet or computer games.** The high is escapism or winning. The low includes tiredness, a sore neck, and guilt at living unhealthily and wasting time.
- **Co-dependent relationships.** The high is feeling important when you help your partner. The low is when they disappoint you again.
- **Sports, food and dieting.**
- **Religion.** The high is devotion. The low is guilt.
- **Money, power, hoarding** and so on.

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"THE BEST WAY TO  
HANDLE FEAR IS WITH  
LOGICAL THOUGHT AND  
REASONING."

.....



### So many activities children do are adrenal

Consider a child's day. He wakes up and drinks a sugary drink, then eats a breakfast cereal with more sugar than a snack bar. He watches a cartoon designed to pump his adrenalin every minute or so with tension, violence, a new bright colour, music and loud voices, and then commercials shout and flash at him. He gets in the car to go to school and plays on his phone, ignoring his mother and sister and trying to escape the dragon, developing only his adrenal glands and his thumb. He sits in school half-awake, because his breakfast carbohydrates are all gone and there is not much flashing or loudness in the classroom. He goes to recess starving and has some chocolate, which raises his sugar levels for a while, but drops them even lower than before. At lunchtime he could get a bit of exercise, but he doesn't feel up to it—he's fairly fat and unfit, and he doesn't have much physical energy. He decides to sit around talking to his friends about last night's TV show. His afternoon is like his morning, except for a sports class where the coach tries to energise the boys with competition. He gets home and flops in front of some electronic entertainment, exchanges the necessary grunts with Mum and maybe Dad, then stays up late watching TV and snacking. He wakes up tired next day to do it all again.

In another country, a boy wakes up at dawn and walks down to the creek for a drink. He comes back and helps his mother with the other children, learning to read their faces and respond to their needs. He eats a simple, natural breakfast, then spends time helping his grandfather fish or his father dig the garden. He may eat a simple lunch, then spends the afternoon playing games and running around with other children, developing amazing fitness and physical skills with friendly competition. He eats dinner with his family, then sits around the fire and listens to some sacred stories. He gets pleasantly tired and drops into bed early.

## Which lifestyle is healthier?

To be honest, ours is, but only because we have better health care and food security. But what if you could choose the best of both worlds for your children? I'm not suggesting you drop out and move to a commune. But what if they had some of the healthy, unprocessed food, outdoor exercise and sociable belonging of the traditional tribes?

**It doesn't have to be just a dream.**



### REFERENCES:

1. John 11:35, The Bible.

**NOTE:** The HopeChannel course *Taking Charge of Your Life* deals with addictions and self-esteem while the *Living Well* course deals with drugs and addictions. To find out more, contact us on 1300 300 389 or [discover@hopechannel.com](mailto:discover@hopechannel.com).

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