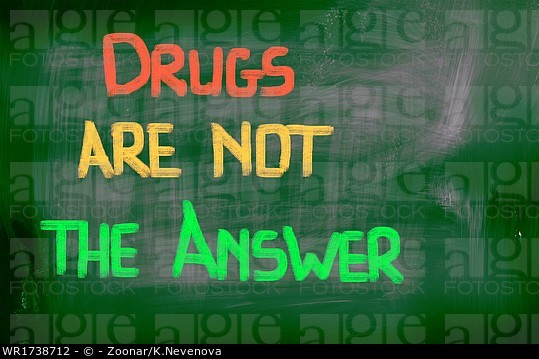
***Richmond Community Center***

**Drug Awareness Month**

Drug abuse is a serious concern. No matter what the age of the offender is, negative repercussions of drug abuse on the individual, the family, and the community, can be long-lasting and ruinous. We hope this document helps you better understand both the causes as well as possible solutions to the problem of abusing illegal drugs.

# Dealing with Illegal Drugs

Anything taken out of moderation can be hazardous. Consuming illegal drugs is no exception to that rule. In fact, the abuse of illegal drugs can be hazardous to the health of everyone involved, even those who remain sober. If you have ever dealt with the stressful situation of caring for, or worrying about, someone who is obviously overdose, you know it can be tough. Some people laugh at those who are high on drugs, thinking it funny when they are behaving strange. However, there is nothing funny about asphyxiation or poisoning of the respiratory center in the brain, both of which can result in death. Ask yourself these questions:

* Do you know about the dangers of drug abuse?
* Do you know when to seek professional help for a friend?
* Are you aware of the long-term health consequences caused by drug abuse when you are young?

Sadly, many college students wish they had sought medical treatment for a friend. Many even feel responsible for drug-related tragedies that could have been prevented. Don’t let those feelings haunt you for the rest of your life. Be proactive now.

## What You Should Know

First, the myths about sobering up by drinking black coffee, taking a cold bath or shower, sleeping it off, or walking it off are just that—myths. They don’t work. The only thing that reverses the consumption of illegal drugs is time. And if you are suffering from drug poisoning, you just don’t have time for it to wear off.

**REALITY CHECK**

* **It takes a long time to recover from drug abuse.**
* **A person with a drug problem could take more than 5 years to become completely clean.**

What Happens When You Are Addicted to Drugs?

Illegal drugs actually depress nerves that control such involuntary actions as breathing and the gag reflex (which prevents choking). If you have overdone it to the point of a fatal dose of illegal drugs, those body functions may stop. You may experience nosebleeds, eyes that are bloodshot or pupils that are smaller or larger than normal, and changes in appetite or sleep patterns. You could also experience seizures or sudden weight loss or weigh gain.

Signs and Symptoms of Drug Dependence

Drug dependence involves all kinds of symptoms of drug abuse. Besides the physical and health warning signs of drug abuse, drug addicts will also experience both behavioral and psychological signs of drug abuse. These warning signs could include unusual or unexplained need for more cash; sudden change in relationship with friends or family; unexplained change in personality or attitude; and periods of unusual hyperactivity or agitation. Other signs and symptoms of drug dependence include:

* Tolerance: Tolerance means that you need more and more drugs to get the same effects. Are you using more and more drugs now than before? In other words, do you need more drugs to get the high as before?
* Withdrawal: When you are withdrawing from drugs, you may experience symptoms such as anxiety, jumpiness, shakiness, trembling, sweating, nausea, vomiting, insomnia, and depression.
* Loss of Control: When you are dependent on drugs, you will tend to use more drugs than you wanted to, and for longer than you intend to.
* Desire to Stop, but Can’t:. You will have a persistent desire to stop your drug intake, but yet you just could not stop taking or stay away from them.
* Neglecting Other Activities: You are spending less and less time on activities with your family and friends, exercising or going to the gym, or pursuing interests or hobbies because all you want to do now is take the drugs.
* Drugs Take Up Greater Time, Energy and Focus: You spend all your time taking and doing drugs and have lost interest in everything else.
* Continued Use Despite Negative Consequences: You continue to use drugs even though you know it is wrong and it is causing you all kinds of problems.

Monitoring the Future (MTF)

A nationwide survey conducted by the annual *Monitoring the Future* (*MTF*) of 12th grade students presented the following findings:

Percentage Items

53.3% never used any illegal drug

58% never smoked marijuana

90.5% never did inhalants

90.7% never did tranquilizers

91.8% never did barbiturates

93.5% never did ecstasy

94% never did cocaine

96.1% never did LSD

97.6% never did methamphetamine

98.8% never did heroin

Consider the following steps in overcoming any drug dependence:

1. Commit to stop taking illegal drugs.
2. Set goals and prepare for change.
3. Make connections with your parents or other adults.
4. Find new meaning in life.
5. Enjoy life and do what you love.
6. Get support.