

Dear Parent,

My name is Lorraine and I am a mom from New York City. I am not only a parent who struggled with a son with an addiction, but I also lost my twin brother to a drug overdose. I hope my letter and experience brings you strength and I just wanted to let you know you are not alone.

My personal struggle began with my twin brother. When he was a teen he began smoking weed. From there he continued to experiment with angel dust and other drugs. Soon he was addicted to cocaine. He married, had a son, but his wife was a user as well. One day he overdosed. A week later he died. I adopted his son so he wouldn't be put into a foster home. I became a single mother overnight. We became best friends and had great times.

When he turned 14 our relationship totally changed. We argued a lot. I became the enemy and everything was my fault. He would come home late and had a ton of excuses. Then there were the late night excuses to leave the house. He slept all day, barely making it to school. I knew there was something wrong and I knew he was using drugs. As things got worse, one day I received a phone call from his school. He had gotten busted for being high and had a huge bag of weed on him. The school gave him two choices, go to a juvenile jail or rehab. I gave him one choice... rehab.

With the help of his biological mother we found a live-in young adult rehab program. He attended the program for 14-months. While in the program, he earned his GED and was attending college at the age of 16. He later went on and graduated from culinary school. Today he is a nutritionist at Sloan Kettering Hospital. He is drug- and alcohol-free and loves to exercise. Treatment works.

A parent or caregiver knows their child better than anyone else. If you suspect your child is using that's the time to get help... for you and your child. My son thanks me often and acknowledges that getting him help saved his life.

Partnership for Drug-Free Kids has and continues to help me and my son. I know that my son is one puff or drink away from relapsing. The tools offered at the Partnership have helped me keep an open line of communication with my son. We talk and have open honest conversations about his life, about his friends who still use. What else? I've learned that I am not alone. I never shared my story with anyone except my mother and siblings. It was the "family secret."

Through the Partnership I learned that both my brother and son have a disease and we as a family have nothing to be ashamed of. We also learned that there are tons of families like mine who live with this family disease and there are tons of people who want to help.

Stay positive and stay strong!

Lorraine McNeill-Popper