

DRUGS AND ADDICTIONS

Contrary to popular opinion of today, Dr. Robert L. DuPont, author of *The Selfish Brain* asserts “Marijuana makes users stupid and lazy. Chronic pot smokers become listless and apathetic, not just when using the drug but all of the time.” Robert DuPont, M.D., has a lifetime of experience as MD, public policy official (Drug czar under President Ford), close affiliation with drug treatment centers, and much research with addictions and recovery. *The Selfish Brain* is a comprehensive study of various drugs and their effect on the brain and how addictions occur. Robert DuPont’s definition of addiction is “loss of control over one’s life, and denial.” He also provides hope that recovery, while difficult, is possible.

Marijuana use has caused a great divide between teens and adults on the one hand, who claim it’s not only harmless but can be used medicinally, and those like Dr. DuPont, who point to research to support the opposite view. *Marijuana smoke contains more tar and cancer-causing chemicals than even cigarette smoke. One marijuana cigarette has as much cancer-causing tar as seventeen tobacco cigarettes. Marijuana smoke, like tobacco smoke, causes bronchitis, inflammation of the airways in the lungs, and chronic respiratory illnesses. THC reduces normal hormone function in both males and females, reducing fertility and causing miscarriages. Users are commonly unaware of their impairments after using small doses of marijuana. Larger doses can precipitate acute anxiety or panic, or schizophrenic episodes, particularly for novice marijuana users and for people subject to these mental health disorders. Some long-term users of marijuana show prolonged, perhaps lifelong, deficits in memory and motivation as well as irritability.*

The optimal approach is to do everything possible to prevent addiction before it occurs. Robert DuPont describes three steps toward the goal of prevention: “*live life with honesty, live life with gratitude, and live life as part of a team.*”

Dr. DuPont believes that addicts can be positively influenced by those close to them, but not through mild response. Strong and serious consequences are necessary; the process can feel unnatural, called “*detaching with love.*” “Patience, persistence, and a sense of humor” are equally important for those who love addicts, as they struggle in recovery. The process of recovery includes 5 steps: “*identification, intervention, treatment, aftercare, and life in recovery.*” The first two steps, identification and intervention can prove to be the most difficult for families to face and accomplish.

Researching and working with addicts and recovery for many years have led DuPont to the position that Twelve Step programs such as AA and NA are extremely effective and important to the community of people in recovery, and for their families. “I have come to this belief from finding so many addicts who got well and stayed well through these Twelve Step programs and

from finding so few alcoholics and addicts who got and stayed well in any other way.” An entire chapter is devoted to how Twelve Step programs work, and addresses criticisms of the programs.

Living with life out of control, identifying addictions, and recovery are all complicated and difficult. But the gift of recovery is worth every ounce of effort necessary. *The Selfish Brain*, at nearly 500 pages, contains a lot of information which can also be overwhelming, but it’s written for the lay person, not the academic, and the reader can find significant useful information by reading the preface and individual chapters. It’s worth the effort.