

# Words Can Work®

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Discussion Guide

Drugs  
True Stories

BLAKEWORKS®

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# Showing *Drugs: True Stories*

*Drugs: True Stories* is appropriate viewing for groups of young people and parents and other caregivers. It can be used in the classroom and in workplace and community workshops. It is also appropriate for family viewing and discussion at home.

You can view the program in its entirety or in segments. Separate discussion questions are offered for young people and for parents and other caregivers. Discussion questions appear at the end of the program and at the end of each segment.

Frequently asked questions are answered by H. Westley Clark, M.D., C.A.S., Director of the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; and Howard J. Shaffer, Ph.D., C.A.S., Director of the Division on Addictions, Cambridge Health Alliance, Harvard Medical School.

*Note: Drugs: True Stories includes copyrighted materials. Broadcast, cablecast, duplication, and Internet or commercial use in trainings or presentations is prohibited. For further information contact Blake Works at 978.282.1663 or [info@wordscanwork.com](mailto:info@wordscanwork.com).*

## **wordscanwork.com**

You can read *Issues and Answers* columns at [wordscanwork.com](http://wordscanwork.com), where young people, parents, and experts share their experiences dealing with drug and alcohol abuse, bullying, depression, and more. You can also read Jeanne Blake's blog, a lively commentary on the issues facing parents and young people.

At [wordscanwork.com](http://wordscanwork.com), you can order *Words Can Work: When Talking About Drugs*. In this booklet, young people share their true stories. Experts offer information, strategies, and the words to start and continue conversations about drugs.

# Profiles

## Joel

Joel abused alcohol and marijuana and eventually became addicted to prescription painkillers. He and his parents describe the turmoil his addiction caused, and how Joel eventually sought help and began recovery.

## Jillian

Joel's younger sister tells why she didn't tell anyone that she suspected her brother was using drugs. She urges other young people to speak up if they think someone they care about is using drugs.

## Trevor

Trevor made a commitment early in his life to stay drug-free. He tells why he made that decision, and how he resists the pressures to use drugs.

## Jeanne Blake

Jeanne Blake is the host and producer of *Drugs: True Stories*. She is president of Blake Works Inc. and the founder of *Words Can Work*®. Blake is a medical reporter, author, and affiliated faculty member of the Division on Addictions, Cambridge Health Alliance, Harvard Medical School.

# Using This Guide

This guide is designed to help you lead discussions with groups of young people, parents, and other caregivers. Parents can use this guide when they discuss the program with their children. Questions are marked for:



young people



parents/caregivers

➤ Follow these arrows to proceed easily through the discussion.

## Impact on Participants

Young people may feel a variety of emotions as they watch the program, due to their own or someone else's drug use or abuse, dependence, or addiction. We suggest making available to viewers a list of resources within their community, including counselors, Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and Alateen.

### PLEASE NOTE

*Drugs: True Stories* takes care to avoid scenes that may trigger drug use. Any triggers viewed in the film are strictly unintentional.

In this guide, references to drugs include "street drugs" such as cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and others; prescription drugs used by people other than those for whom the drugs were prescribed by a doctor; and alcohol, as its use under age 21 is against the law.

## Before Viewing the Program

Prepare participants for viewing the program by asking the following questions:

### ➤ Ask participants

- When is a drug safe to use?

*Answer: When a doctor prescribes it for a particular medical condition, and when it's taken as directed, under the doctor's supervision, by the person for whom it was prescribed.*

- What are some of the dangers of using mood-altering drugs?

# Joel



## ➤ Introduction

In *Drugs: True Stories*, Joel tells how his drug use affected him and his family. Let's watch the first segment of Joel's story.

## ➤ Begin discussion for young people by saying

Young people who use alcohol and other drugs do so for a variety of reasons.

## ➤ Ask young people

- What are the reasons Joel started to use alcohol?
- Joel says alcohol "took him out of himself." What do you think this means?
- What happened when the effects of the alcohol and marijuana wore off?
- Name some pressures young people deal with.

- List healthy ways of dealing with these pressures.

*\*Suggest the following answers if not given:*

- Exercise
- Write about what you are feeling
- Listen to music
- Talk to a friend, parent, or another adult you trust

- Why is it dangerous to use alcohol or other drugs to cope?

- Why did Joel need more and more alcohol and marijuana to get high?

*Answer: When people repeatedly use mood-changing drugs, their minds and bodies build up a tolerance. They need more and more of the drugs to get high.*

## ➤ Remind young people

If you use drugs repeatedly—sometimes if you misuse drugs even once—you can create a permanent change in your brain. To learn more about how drug use can affect the brain, visit [wordscanwork.com](http://wordscanwork.com).



## ➤ Introduction

In *Drugs: True Stories*, Joel tells how his drug use affected him and his family. Let's watch the first segment of Joel's story.

## ➤ Begin discussion for parents and other caregivers by saying

Joel's parents say they had no idea Joel was using alcohol and marijuana.

## ➤ Ask parents and other caregivers

- What have you told your children about using alcohol and other drugs?
- If your child were using alcohol or marijuana, how would you know?
- If you learned that your child smoked marijuana, how would you respond?
- If you learned that your child was using alcohol, how would you respond?
- If you would respond differently to each drug, explain why.
- Why did Joel need more and more drugs to get high?

*Answer: His mind and body were building up a tolerance to the drugs.*

## ➤ Remind parents and other caregivers

If you use drugs repeatedly—sometimes if you misuse drugs even once—you can create a permanent change in your brain. Young people whose parents talk with them about the consequences of drug use are less likely to use drugs. To learn more about how drug use can affect the brain, visit [wordscanwork.com](http://wordscanwork.com).

## **wordscanwork.com**

You can read *Issues and Answers* columns at [wordscanwork.com](http://wordscanwork.com), where young people, parents, and experts share their experiences dealing with drug and alcohol abuse, bullying, depression, and more. You can also read Jeanne Blake's blog, a lively commentary on the issues facing parents and young people.

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# Abusing Prescription Drugs



## ➤ Introduction

Joel's drug use continues. Let's watch the next segment.

## ➤ Begin discussion for young people by saying

Joel used prescription painkillers without considering the consequences.

## ➤ Ask young people

- Why do you think Joel agreed to try prescription painkillers?
- Why is it dangerous to use medication that's prescribed for someone else?
- Joel says drugs gave him a temporary sense of superiority—that he was better than other people. How did he feel when the effects of the drugs wore off?
- How did his peers *really* see him when he was high?  
*Answer: Joel says that, in reality, he looked like an idiot.*
- If your best friend avoided you because he or she was using drugs, what would you do?

## ➤ Remind young people

When a doctor prescribes a drug, he or she has decided that the possible benefits of taking the medicine outweigh the risks. Some of the drugs that Joel abused are taken legally by people who need them to relieve pain. But there's nothing safe about taking drugs that are prescribed for someone else. Using drugs in ways a doctor didn't prescribe is dangerous.



## ➤ Introduction

Joel's drug use continues. Let's watch the next segment.

## ➤ Begin discussion for young people by saying

Joel used prescription painkillers without considering the consequences.

## ➤ Ask parents and other caregivers

- What have you told your child about the dangers of using drugs, including prescription pills not prescribed for him or her?
- What do you do with unused prescription drugs in your home?
- List the warning signs of drug use.<sup>1</sup>

*Answer: If your child exhibits one or more of the following behaviors or moods, drugs might have become a part of his or her life. It is worth noting that these are also symptoms of other potential problems and therefore deserve parental attention whether drugs are the cause or whether something else is the cause.*

- Is withdrawn, depressed, tired, or careless about personal grooming.
  - Is hostile, uncooperative, and frequently breaks curfews.
  - Relationships with family members have deteriorated.
  - Hangs around with a new group of friends.
  - Grades have slipped, and school attendance is irregular.
  - Loses interest in hobbies, sports, and other favorite activities.
  - Eating and sleeping patterns have changed.
  - Has a hard time concentrating.
  - Has red-rimmed eyes and runny nose, but doesn't have allergies or a cold.
  - Household money has been disappearing.
  - You find items in your home: pipes, rolling papers, small medicine bottles, eye drops, butane lighters, homemade pipes, or bongos (pipes that use water as a filter) made from soda cans or plastic beverage containers.
- What steps would you take if you saw warnings of drug use in your child?

<sup>1</sup>Partnership for a Drug-Free America

### ➤ **Remind parents and other caregivers**

Susan says Joel was never in trouble, so she didn't think he was using drugs. If you notice warning signs in your child, talk with his or her healthcare provider. Don't deny what you see. Take steps to rule out drug use.

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# Spiraling into Addiction



## ➤ Introduction

Addiction is a disease. Let's watch as Joel's addiction progresses.

## ➤ Begin discussion for young people by saying

When someone is addicted, drugs take priority over everything. Joel was not going to classes, he was skipping baseball practice, and he was risking going to jail.

## ➤ Ask young people

- How do you think he felt about himself when this was happening?
- Why do you think Joel kept using drugs even when his world was crashing around him?
- What do you think it's like to have your life controlled by addiction to a drug?
- Why do you think Joel finally told his dad that everyone was telling the truth but him?

## ➤ Remind young people

Some people use illegal drugs with little consequence. Others experience serious consequences, including addiction. You can't predict how they will affect you.



### ➤ Introduction

Addiction is a disease. Let's watch as Joel spirals into addiction.

### ➤ Begin discussion for parents and other caregivers by saying

Addiction is considered a family disease because everyone living with a drug abuser is affected by his or her behavior.

### ➤ Ask parents and other caregivers

- Joel's parents wanted to continue to believe him. Why do you think it was so hard for them to face the truth?
- Why are parents sometimes hesitant to confront their child about suspicious behavior?
- If you suspect your child is using drugs, why is it important not to brush aside feelings of suspicion, but to seek help?

### ➤ Remind parents and other caregivers

Taking positive steps to ensure a child's safety is a parent's responsibility.

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# Trying to Get Clean



## ➤ Introduction

Sometimes people have to get treatment to give up drugs. Let's watch the next segment of Joel's story.

## ➤ Begin discussion for young people by saying

During detox, Joel finally realized that he needed help.

## ➤ Ask young people

- Joel kept using drugs even when friends were dying from overdoses. What does this tell you about the disease of addiction?
- What would you say if a friend told you he or she was going to try drugs?
- Brian risked his friendship with Joel by reporting his drug use to Herb. What does this tell you about Brian?
- How do you think Joel felt when he told his friends he was going back into detox?
- Relapse is common after drug treatment. Why is it hard for a person addicted to drugs to stay clean?

*Answer: In people with addiction, drugs are woven into every aspect of their lives. They have biological and psychological dependence. Recovery requires that they relearn how to live their lives without using drugs.*

## ➤ Remind young people

It's difficult for someone who is addicted to stop using drugs. Some people don't recover. With professional help and support, most people can get well.



## ➤ Introduction

Sometimes people have to get treatment to give up drugs. Let's watch the next segment of Joel's story.

## ➤ Begin discussion for parents and other caregivers by saying

Joel had gone through detox, and his family was in still in turmoil.

## ➤ Ask parents and other caregivers

- Relapse is common after drug treatment. Why is it hard for a person addicted to drugs to stay clean?

*Answer: In people with addiction, drugs are woven into every aspect of their lives. They have biological and psychological dependence. Recovery requires that they relearn how to live their lives without using drugs.*

- Joel kept using drugs even when friends were dying from overdoses. What does this tell you about the disease of addiction?
- Joel manipulated Susan and Herb, as he continued to hide his addiction. What do you hope you'd do differently if you faced a similarly confusing situation?

## ➤ Remind parents and other caregivers

Although it's difficult to stop using drugs, most people who have become addicted to using drugs do stop. Some stop on their own and others stop with various forms of help, for example, self-help or professional help.

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# Recovery



## ➤ Introduction

Let's see how Joel was finally able to quit using drugs and stay clean.

## ➤ Begin discussion for young people by saying

To recover from an addiction to drugs, a person has to want to get well.

## ➤ Ask young people

- Why do you think Joel finally admitted to his dad that he needed help?
- If you tried drugs, what do you think the chances are that something bad would happen to you? If you are willing to risk using drugs, explain why.

*\*Note: This question goes to the heart of decision making among young people. It deserves focused attention. Discussion of this question can help young people learn to anticipate potential consequences.*

- What did you learn about drug use that you didn't know before watching Joel's story?
- What did you learn about the effects of drugs on the brain?
- Joel used drugs because they "took him out of himself." How does he deal with his negative emotions now?
- Joel wanted to hang out with guys who used drugs. In the end, who were his true friends?

## ➤ Remind young people

Some people who develop an addiction do so quickly. Among others, addiction can progress over years. If you use drugs, there is no way to predict how you'll respond. The best way to avoid addiction is to avoid using drugs in the first place.



### ➤ Introduction

Let's see how Joel was finally able to quit using drugs and stay clean.

### ➤ Begin discussion for parents and other caregivers by saying

Joel's story proves you can stop using drugs and lead a healthy, productive life.

### ➤ Ask parents and other caregivers

- What have you learned from Joel's story about the effect that drugs can have on the brain?
- What have you learned from hearing Herb and Susan describe their denial?
- Susan says they took an "easier road" believing that their son was not using drugs. In the long run, why wasn't denial easier?
- Parents want to trust their children, but it's their responsibility to protect them. How can parents walk this fine line?
- How do you help your child deal with his or her emotions in a healthy way?
- In handling your own emotions, how can you be a good role model for your child?

### ➤ Remind parents and other caregivers

Some parents deny that their child may be using drugs, because it's too frightening to consider. But if you ignore signs of trouble, you leave your child vulnerable. To learn more about how drug use can affect the brain, visit [wordscanwork.com](http://wordscanwork.com).

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# Jillian



## ➤ Introduction

Joel's drug use affected his entire family. Let's hear what his younger sister has to say.

## ➤ Begin discussion for young people by saying

Jillian felt torn between loyalty to her brother and doing the right thing.

## ➤ Ask young people

- What might have happened if Jillian had told her parents she was worried about Joel?
- What would you do if a sibling was using drugs?
- Why do you think Jillian seems so sad when she talks about her brother's drug use?
- How do you think Joel feels knowing that he's caused Jillian so much turmoil?
- How would you feel if you caused your family years of emotional pain?

## ➤ Remind young people

If you suspect a sibling or a friend is using drugs, tell an adult you trust.

### ➤ Introduction

Joel's drug use affected his entire family. Let's hear what his younger sister has to say.

### ➤ Begin discussion for parents and other caregivers by saying

Jillian experienced a lot of turmoil by keeping her concerns about her brother a secret.

### ➤ Ask parents and other caregivers

- What might have happened if Jillian had told her parents she was concerned about Joel?
- How do you let your children know it's important to tell you if they're worried about the safety of a friend or sibling?
- How can you help your children understand that choosing to use drugs affects everyone close to them?

### ➤ Remind parents and other caregivers

It's important to encourage your children to come to you if they suspect a sibling or friend is engaging in unsafe behaviors. Remind them that doing so is not disloyal, but could save a life.

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# Trevor



## ➤ Introduction

Let's watch the story of a young man who's committed to being drug-free.

## ➤ Begin discussion for young people by saying

Many young people like Trevor avoid drugs despite feeling pressure to use them.

## ➤ Ask young people

- What are some reasons Trevor avoids using drugs?
- How did Trevor feel when classmates rejected him?
- Sometimes people use drugs to cope with feelings of sadness. Name healthy ways Trevor deals with his emotions.

*Answers:*

- *Talks with his mother.*
- *Writes about his feelings.*
- *Plays music.*
- *Spends time with friends and mentors who support him.*
- If some young people can't talk with their parents, who else can they turn to for support?
- Why, as Trevor suggests, is it important to think ahead about what could happen if you use drugs?
- Trevor sets goals for himself. Name a goal you've set for yourself.
- How could using drugs affect your ability to reach your goal?

## ➤ Remind young people

Sometimes a parent isn't available to you, or able to talk openly. If you try but still can't talk openly with your mother or father, you *can* find another trusted adult to listen, to care, and to offer guidance.



## ➤ Introduction

Let's watch the story of a young man who's committed to being drug-free.

## ➤ Begin discussion for parents and other caregivers by saying

Trevor says drugs were "all around" him. Still, he didn't use them.

## ➤ Ask parents and other caregivers

- Trevor's mother kept a close eye on her sons. In what ways can parents monitor a child's activities to ensure his or her safety?
- How can you help your child think through the potential consequences of drug use?
- Some people use drugs to cope with negative feelings. How can you model healthy ways of handling stress?
- How do you let your child know he or she can come to you with problems?
- When your child wants to talk...*just talk*...are you able to listen without judging?
- Trevor sets goals for himself. How can you help your child set and achieve goals?

## ➤ Remind parents and other caregivers

You can help your child to avoid using drugs. Talk openly with him or her, and ask smart questions: "Why do you think some people use drugs?" "I'd love to hear what you're thinking. Let's talk about it." "Say you're at a party where drugs are being used. Would you use drugs? How come?" "If you decide to try a drug, what could happen next?"

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## Blake Works Inc.

Blake Works Inc. produces research-based media (DVDs, the *Words Can Work* series of booklets, discussion guides, training materials, and [wordscanwork.com](http://wordscanwork.com)) to help young people and their peers and families talk about the challenges kids face growing up. Blake Works Inc. is certified as a Woman Owned Business.

Jeanne Blake is the host and producer of *Drugs: True Stories* and the president of Blake Works. She is a television medical reporter and an affiliated faculty member at the Division on Addictions, Cambridge Health Alliance, Harvard Medical School.

Blake speaks to parents at corporations and at health care and community organizations. She consults nationally on family communication. She is also the president of Family Health Productions.

## Levine Family Recovery High School Scholarship

This fund supports students who have attended a recovery high school for at least one year, are pursuing higher education, and are committed to maintaining their sobriety. To find out more about recovery high schools and the scholarship fund, or to make a donation, please visit [wordscanwork.com](http://wordscanwork.com).

## DVDs with discussion guides available at [wordscanwork.com](http://wordscanwork.com)

### **Alcohol: True Stories Hosted by Matt Damon** (20 minutes)

Underage drinking can have devastating consequences. Young people tell their powerful stories to encourage peers to avoid underage drinking. *For grades 5 through 12, college freshmen, parents, and other caregivers.* Meets criteria as a *Program with Promise*.

### **Boys on Bullying** (20 minutes)

Bullying causes depression, anger, and isolation. These teens tell how they handled their situations through support from friends, parents, or other caring adults. *For grades 5 through 12, parents, and other caregivers.*

### **Depression: True Stories** (20 minutes)

Young adults and their families talk about living with depression and the importance of early diagnosis and treatment. *For grades 6 through college, parents, and other caregivers.*

### **Drugs: True Stories** (30 minutes)

Joel's abuse of alcohol and marijuana led to addiction to prescription pills. He, his parents, and sister discuss their denial and how Joel eventually began his recovery. Trevor tells how he avoided drugs and stays drug-free. H. Westley Clark, M.D., C.A.S., Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, and Howard J. Shaffer, Ph.D., C.A.S., Division on Addictions, Harvard Medical School answer FAQ. Includes discussion guide. *For grades 5 through college, parents, and other caregivers.* Q&A from experts on DVD only.

### **In Our Own Words: Teens and AIDS** (20 minutes)

Teens infected with HIV through unprotected intercourse discuss denial, condoms, postponing sex, and alcohol's affect on decision-making. *For grades 5 through 12, parents, and other caregivers.*

### **The Power of Girls: Inside and Out** (20 minutes)

Strong connections help young people make healthy choices. These girls discuss how they dealt with bullying, eating disorders, early sexual activity, and deep loss by talking with friends, parents, or other caring adults. *For grades 5 through 12, parents, and other caregivers.*

### **Raising Healthy Kids: Families Talk About Sexual Health** (2 DVDs–20 minutes)

Parents and young people tell how they discuss sexual health. Experts offer insight and skills to help families start and continue these conversations. *For parents and other caregivers.*

Program #1 For Parents of Young Children (20 minutes)

Program #2 For Parents of Preadolescents and Adolescents (20 minutes)

### **Steroids: True Stories Hosted by Curt Schilling** (20 minutes)

Boston Red Sox pitcher Curt Schilling tells how Craig abused steroids. Craig, his parents, and sister describe their five-year "nightmare." Nate, 18, builds his strength naturally. Roberto Olivardia, Ph.D., Harvard Medical School, answers FAQ. *For grades 6 through college, parents, and other caregivers.* A portion of the proceeds is donated to Curt's Pitch for ALS.

## **Words Can Work** booklets by Jeanne Blake available at [wordscanwork.com](http://wordscanwork.com) reinforce key messages.

### ***Words Can Work: When Talking About Alcohol***

Young people and parents tell how they discuss underage drinking. Experts offer facts, strategies, and the words to help young people and families talk about alcohol use.

### ***Words Can Work: When Talking About Drugs***

Young people and parents tell their stories about drug abuse, addiction, and the benefits of staying drug-free. Experts offer facts, strategies, and the words to help young people and families talk about drug use.

### ***Words Can Work: When Talking About Healthy Weight***

Young people and parents discuss a range of topics: achieving and maintaining healthy weight, the importance of nurturing a positive body image, and preventing eating disorders. Experts offer facts, strategies, and the words to help young people and families talk about these topics.

### ***Words Can Work: When Talking About Mental Health***

Young people and parents discuss living with depression and other mental health disorders. Experts offer facts, strategies, and the words to help young people and families talk about these topics.

### ***Words Can Work: When Talking With Kids About Sexual Health***

Young people and parents discuss puberty, values, relationships, postponing sex, and birth control. Experts, including former Surgeon General David Satcher, M.D., offer facts, strategies, and the words to help young people and families talk about these topics.

### ***Words Can Work: When Talking About Steroids***

Young people and parents tell their stories about anabolic steroids and the benefits of building strength naturally. Experts offer facts, strategies, and the words to help young people and families talk about anabolic steroids.

**Classroom activities/discussion points for *Words Can Work* booklets  
can be downloaded from [wordscanwork.com](http://wordscanwork.com).**

**Order at [wordscanwork.com](http://wordscanwork.com)**

Quantity discounts available

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