A mother's story

By Danielle Smoot, New Carlisle, Ohio

Think of what went through your mind when you first learned you'd be a parent. Or if you don't have children, let me tell you what those first thoughts were like for me.

So many fantasies go through your mind. For me, I wondered what my baby was going to look like; will they have my Dad's eyes or Mom's freckles? Will they be smart, funny, and – most of all – just when will she (or is it he?) finally get here?

Those early thoughts also envision the numerous milestones a child will achieve throughout life. A parent-to-be imagines their child's first day of school, graduating high school, going off to college, what their spouse will look like, how many children will they have. In those first few hours after learning the good news, we create a whole lifetime in daydreams for a child who's not yet born.

And yet – what is never imagined, because it's totally unimaginable – is that one day someone will be telling you that your child has died before he or she reached many of those milestones. Well, that is exactly what my reality became when my firstborn son, Cole, died of a prescription drug overdose.

Nothing could have prepared me for that moment, as I had no warning. Cole was a good kid, performing as athlete, great student, amazing older brother, compassionate friend, and a loving son. Cole was not a drug user; he was not what I would have considered "that kind of kid." Now, three years after his death, I know there is no such thing as a "type" of person who is susceptible to drug use or abuse. Everyone is at risk for prescription drug abuse. By using the word abuse, I don't necessarily mean addicted, although that is definitely a very strong possibility. In this case, Cole didn't die from abusing drugs over a long period of time; rather it was from just a single ingestion.

On February 12, 2011, Cole for the first and last time, decided to take a prescription drug that was not his own. When displaying symptoms of drug ingestion, his father and I took him to the local emergency room where he was tested, evaluated, and released. A few short hours later, Cole was found dead, lying in his bed. The medicine suppressed his vital organs, causing him to stop breathing sometime during the night. Cole had taken Methadone, and just one pill killed him. In fact, just one bad decision ended his life.

Cole was not alone though in this tragic adventure. A good friend had given him the pill. He, too, was an incredible young man who made a bad decision. While many say he is lucky when compared to Cole, he has a much more difficult road to travel – he has to live. He has to live with the knowledge of his role in Cole's death, and deal with a lifetime of regret.

However, the story does not end there. Other teens knew the drugs were being distributed in the school the day

before they landed in Cole's hands. Many of his own friends knew Cole had them. Not one person told a trusted adult who could have easily prevented this tragedy. They were the victims of an "innocent bystander," who thought it was somebody else's responsibility to tell someone.

Cole must have thought he was bullet proof, as typical for many teens his age. He thought he was immune from the dangers and consequences of taking drugs. What he and his friends didn't know is that prescription drugs can be more deadly than illegal ones. Not only are they deadly, they are prolific. They can be found in almost every medicine cabinet, in most homes, and are rapidly ending up in the hands of too many teens.

This tragedy all came down to one bad choice, one bad decision. Cole got the easy way out; it is his family and friends that are forced to live with his decision for life. None of this had to happen, and unfortunately it is happening each and every day. More people die from drug overdose than car crashes.

We have to do something; we cannot just sit back and let our young people die. I join Governor John Kasich's call urging Ohio families to adopt a pledge for the coming year: talk to your children about the dangers of drugs. His new StartTalking initiative focuses on ways we can all work to reduce the likelihood of youth drug use before it even starts. This is a community problem and it is going to take the whole community to rally together to address this issue. The first step is to Start Talking!

Start Talking!

Building a Drug-Free Future

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