

How to “Immunize” Children against Drug and Alcohol Abuse

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Letter to Editor

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Early childhood (from prenatal to 8 years of age) is the most critical period in life. During this time, the brain begins developing more rapidly than at any other time in human life.¹ During this stage, the developing brain is highly flexible and “plastic” to its surroundings, and the child is highly influenced by caregivers and family.² There is strong evidence that the origins of many behavior and mental health problems are rooted in early childhood,³ and the quality of parenting a child receives is essential for later mental health trajectories.⁴ Early childhood offers the greatest opportunity for prevention of mental illness and behavioral problems in later life as well as drug use.⁵ Tackling the epidemic of drug use warrants a life course perspective that acknowledges the impact of parenting behaviors in preventing the development of drug use among youth.

While there is strong evidence that early childhood has a powerful and lasting influence on preventing drug abuse in later life, there is currently a paucity of books that focus on this critical period.⁵ *How to “Immunize” Children against Drug and Alcohol Abuse: A Research-Based Guide Focusing on Early Childhood*, by Nouzar Nakhaee, is therefore particularly welcome, as it attempts to, in plain language, provide families with drug and alcohol abuse prevention tips based on the recent research evidence.

The perspective of this book is novel. It emphasizes on parenting tips concerning children ages zero to eight. The field of drug prevention

has mainly been devoted to promote preventive strategies among adolescents and school-aged children instead of early stages of life.⁶ The golden period of early childhood and the critical role of parents in this period is suffering from a global relative global neglect.⁷ The main strengths of this book are its focus on early childhood coupled with the explaining the pivotal role of parents in primordial prevention of drug abuse. The beginning of the book is decorated by an epigraph from Frederick Douglass who in 1855 wrote, “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.” This famous quote warns us to be aware of children’s “right to a safe and healthy childhood”.⁸

The key features of this book are as follows: 1. Clarity and simplicity: that parents of all ages and education level can understand it; 2. This is a very terse book, only 37 pages: Today’s generation is more inclined to read summary books; 3. The key messages are illustrated: Twenty-four caricatures and cartoons illustrated by an award-winning caricaturist (Muhammad Saleh Razm-Hosseini) were added to the book. This feature increases the appeal and comprehensibility of the book. 4. It is evidence based and up to date: At least one reference is given for each parenting and behavioral advice to parents.

In conclusion, this book is a valuable addition to the field of substance abuse prevention. It creates opportunities for parents, caregivers, and counsellors to intervene in early life –even in prenatal period- “to build strong children” resilient to drug use.

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