

# THE SEVEN

## CHALLENGES



We decided to open up and talk honestly about ourselves and about alcohol and other drugs.



We looked at what we liked about alcohol and other drugs, and why we were using them.



We looked at our use of alcohol or other drugs to see if it has caused harm or could cause harm.



We looked at our responsibility and the responsibility of others for our problems.



We thought about where we seemed to be headed, where we wanted to go, and what we wanted to accomplish.



We made thoughtful decisions about our lives and about our use of alcohol and other drugs.



We followed through on our decisions about our lives and drug use. If we saw problems, we went back to earlier challenges and mastered them.

Traditional approaches to working with adolescents with drug problems have produced high drop out rates and disappointing outcomes. The mad rush to get youth to immediately say "I will quit" often leads to either increased defiance or increased dishonesty, with young people telling adults what they "want to hear." It also leads to failure among certain youth who follow adult directives to quit, but soon relapse because they have not laid a solid foundation for success. Most young people do not seek drug treatment of their own free will. Most are dragged to counseling by their collars. By any definition, they are in the early stages of change. The Seven Challenges Program starts where youth "are at" (usually resistant and reluctant to change), not where adults wish they might be or where young people often pretend to be -- ready, willing, and prepared to succeed with immediate abstinence.

Although the program strategy includes capturing any sincere impulse to quit, counselors avert power struggles and insincere commitments to change by striving for honesty and engagement instead of charging ahead with the "mad rush for abstinence." We avoid the pitfall of teaching people to be drug free before they have honestly decided to be drug free. We also resist the temptation to follow the common practice of locking horns; trying to convince young people that they have problems, and backing them into defensive positions. Instead of fear and coercion, we harness the enormous power of education, finesse and respectful confrontation. We take the slow but steady approach.

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