

Using Buddies: Overcoming Chemical Incest

by [Dr. Michael Absatz](#)

How did Robert Downey, Jr. become hooked on drugs? Some people wonder if his dad enticed him into drug use when he was very young. There are millions of young people whose parents use drugs, and want their kids to become “using buddies.” I know of one such family where the young boy was in his teens when his dad started drinking and smoking pot with him. They traveled to Las Vegas, Amsterdam, and other places and did drugs together. This was one of the major “bonding” experiences they shared. The young man is now in his twenties, and has used cocaine frequently in the last year. Did he use cocaine with his dad? His dad has been a drug dealer and can acquire drugs easily.

Sexual incest between parent and child is punishable by law. Emotional incest, where the parent adultifies a child and expects him or her to take the emotional place of a spouse, is also harmful. However, it is not clearly obvious, and not punishable by law. Chemical incest is where children are enticed into drug use by their parents, becoming “using buddies.” These children may be as young as four or five. Typically, chemical incest occurs most frequently during early to middle adolescence.

Why are children so susceptible to chemical incest?

Children are easily convinced to use drugs by their parents. As in cases of sexual and emotional incest, children are extremely vulnerable and loyal to their parents. They imitate what their parents do. They do what their parents say. If dad says “drugs are okay,” then they are. If the only kind of “quality” time a child can spend with his or her dad is to use drugs with him, then he or she probably will.

Why it is hard for children who were victims of chemical incest to quit using drugs?

Before the child knows it, he or she has a “drug habit” and associates drug use with loyalty to the family and an opportunity to bond. It is difficult to leave the drug because it involves leaving the family, and facing the fact that one has been used, manipulated, and betrayed by someone one trusted. It also means an end to the bonding time.

Parents who are addicted to chemical substances often have few friends, and may want their children to provide them with support and companionship. They often lack goals and purpose, and feel empty inside. They have probably abused or neglected their children. With the possibility of becoming “using buddies,” the child feels needed and wanted. Drug use becomes part of a family ritual—a way of getting attention, and feeling connected. The drug is also chemically addicting, and the child or adolescent develops a dependency upon it.

Why has so little been written about this type of incest?

We have not wanted to face the fact that parents can ruin their children’s lives through their chemical abuse. Parents who entice their kids into using drugs face no penalties. They live in denial about their own use, and often do not believe they are harming their child by using drugs together. This was one of the major “bonding” experiences they shared. The young man is now in his twenties, and has used cocaine frequently in the last year. Did he use cocaine with his dad? His dad has been a drug dealer and can acquire drugs easily.

How do young people overcome chemical incest?

First, they need to go through a detoxification process so that the chemical is drained from their system. Then they have to go through some type of treatment, where they examine their family or origin issues, feeling their feelings, and facing the reality of their parents emotional and chemical abuse. Third, they need to realize that they have been manipulated and betrayed, and grieve the loss of trust that they feel. This may mean maintaining a safe distance from the using parent. Confrontation of a parent is important, and the child needs to tell his or her parent how it feels to have been coerced into drug use. Parents need to own up to their own manipulation of their children.

What can be done about it?

Chemical incest is real and destroys many lives. Immature, selfish parents use their power to control, dominate, and ruin their children's lives. "Using buddies" prop their parents up temporarily, but ultimately can't heal their parents' deep emotional pain. Perhaps, we need special support groups for young people whose chemical addictions started when their parents exposed them to drugs at early ages. They are dealing with different issues than other chemical , perhaps similar to sexual incest survivors.

It is time to face the reality that chemical incest is child abuse, and laws need to be created to punish parents who take innocent children and turn them into "using buddies."