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Psychiatrist Offers Ways To 'Trip' Without Using Drugs

By ARTHUR J. SNIDER

CHICAGO (CDN) — It doesn't do any good to tell drug abusers about the evils of drugs, says Dr. Sidney Cohen, a psychiatrist at UCLA. Instead, he writes in the Journal of the American Medical Assn., inroads can be made only by offering more desirable alternatives.

Cohen listed 10 ways an adolescent can enjoy zestful "trips" without resorting to drugs:

- The sensation of a healthy body in motion. Movement — walking, running, dancing, gymnastics and group sports — not only discharges tension, but also promotes a positive feeling. "Motion and emotion are intimately related."

- Sensory awareness. "A purity of sensory perception can be achieved without drugs and is more genuine," said Cohen. "In our preoccupation with training the child to remember facts, we have ignored the training of his senses. To really 'see' is a delight. It is not the exclusive property of the artist or poet."

- Psychological awareness. Self-understanding through reading, meditation, self-observation or a self-help group.

- Interpersonal awareness. After understanding one's self, honesty and openness with others becomes possible. Sensitivity and other types of group sessions help but the best way to learn how to enjoy people is to be with them.

- Rites of passage. Many abuse drugs to remove feelings of worthlessness and enhance their self-identity. It has been found by a few treatment groups that drug-dependent people get confidence from such self-survival skills as wilderness training, mountain climbing and sky diving.

- Work as fun. Acquiring skills to repair appliances or produce hand-crafted or decorative items may eventually become a vocation that leads to a new way of life.

- Esthetic appreciation. "Today's youth has great interest and appreciation for music. We are all more creative than we think. If we could only find the areas of greatest meaning to the young person whom we are trying to help, he would prefer his own innovative and creative ideas and activities over anything else," said Cohen.

- Learning. Intellectual pursuits are not highly regarded these days. Yet for some youths, study can become as exciting as it has been for members of every generation.

- Nonrational experience. Yoga, Zen, mystical Christianity and many other forms of mystical experience have been found to be good substitutes for drug dependence. Spiritual exercises and mystical experience can supplant chemical insights. Sensory deprivation, biofeedback training or directed fantasy also can be helpful.

- Social and political activism. The fact that some drug-using students were able to 'stay clean for Gene' during the presidential primaries of 1968 means that working for social change and political reform is another alternative to drug taking.