

COULD THIS CHILD BE A FUTURE DRUG ABUSER?

This is Meryl. She has got the loveliest eyes and the sweetest smile a girl can have. She is 12 years old this year. She attends the neighbourhood primary school just three bus stops down the road from where she lives and walks there every morning together with the family's domestic helper.

Meryl has always been a quiet individual, especially ever since she was bullied by her classmates in Primary One. It affected her self-esteem and confidence, making it difficult for her to trust or confide in anyone. Meryl's mother, who used to be her closest confidant, barely has time for her daughter now because of her new job. Her father, whom she looks up to as a role model, travels overseas frequently for work for long periods of time and only comes home once a month.

Meryl spends most of her time in school by herself. She dreams of helping others by becoming a doctor one day - but her grades are slipping. With major examinations coming up at the end of the year, Meryl's prospects look quite bleak. Also, due to her low self-esteem, she is unable to bring herself to talk to others about her problems.

Meryl's sister, Ashley, who is five years older, is now her closest companion. Ashley dropped out of school last year and has started working. She has also started drinking and smoking due to the influence of her older boyfriend who often comes over to their home. Once, Meryl even saw Ashley smoke something called 'weed' that her boyfriend gave. Of course, she tried it out of curiosity as her sister looked like she was having fun.

Curiosity kills the cat, they say. And that incident sparked the beginning of Meryl's incessant drug abuse.

Does your child, like both daughters, Meryl and Ashley,

- **Look different (e.g. bloodshot eyes, bloody and runny nose, weight loss or gain)?**
- **Feel easily troubled or experience sudden mood swings?**
- **Feel isolated and socially withdrawn?**
- **Lose interest in his/her favourite hobbies and sports?**
- **Have trouble communicating with you?**
- **Have an unusual need for money?**

If so, your child could be abusing drugs. Read the warning signs and take decisive action immediately. You can be a powerful influence in your child's life. Find time to talk to your child and understand the reasons behind his or her drug addiction. The sooner you respond, the better (for you and your child).