

## COMMENTARY: No child immune to addiction

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COMMENTARY BY GINGER KATZ —

On Sept. 10, 1996, I lost my 20-year-old son Ian to a drug overdose just before he was going into a rehabilitation program the next day. Ian had used tobacco, alcohol, marijuana and other drugs in high school. At one point he was picked up by an officer at a park in Norwalk, Conn. He was scolded and told to go home. The officer said "If I ever find you in this town again with any drugs, I will arrest you, now go home."

I insisted that Ian go into counseling at that point. I had such high hopes for Ian; I thought we had caught a possible addiction early. I thought it all went away, until I received the phone call from his biological Dad stating he was snorting heroin in college. My breath was taken away. My life changed. My friends knew there was something different about me.

At first, I was ashamed of his problem. I didn't want to tell anyone about his problem when he came home from college. He was going to a day treatment program and we thought his problem was being fixed. He didn't want me to tell his friends who did not know. The ugly truth is, the problem wasn't fixed. I found him in the morning just before I was going to meet my friend at 6 a.m. for our morning run.

Ian died in his sleep. Neighbors told me my cries for help to 911 that morning were heard two blocks away.

Addiction does not discriminate. It doesn't matter who you are, it doesn't matter what race you are, how financially sound you are, if you're homeless or if you have a family who loves you dearly. It can happen to anyone. Drug addiction not only destroys the person who is using; it also destroys the family. Addiction robs you of your money, it robs you of your spirit, and finally, when you have nothing else left to give ... it robs you of your soul. My son Ian was a good, kind person who suffered from a terrible disease, and we miss him every day of our lives.

My husband and I founded the **Courage to Speak Foundation Inc.** a non-profit 501-c3 organization in 1996 in the following months after Ian died. My community as well as others wanted me to speak out. The organization was formed to help reduce the drug use among young people and to encourage parents to learn everything our children will be exposed to. Even if you think your child will never do drugs you must find out what they will be exposed to. My husband and I have given over 1,000 presentations nationally,

sharing our message with students in elementary, middle, high school and colleges, and to parents, as well as other forums to prevent this tragedy from happening to another family.

We also developed a new program for parents called Courage to Speak – Courageous Parenting 101. The program is a free four-session (once a week) substance abuse education and prevention program for parents wishing to arm themselves with the knowledge of how to keep their children safe.

I will be presenting Courage to Speak today and Wednesday at Quincy and North Quincy high schools. I urge all parents to talk to their children at the dinner table on Tuesday and Wednesday night. Visit [www.couragetospeak.org](http://www.couragetospeak.org).