

Explaining Celebrity Drug Deaths to Children

A celebrity drug death is a teachable moment for your child, a time to start a long-term conversation about drug abuse.

By Karen Perry

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Let's face it: many of our children admire young celebrities. As part of our celebrity-obsessed culture, they follow their every step, from their latest haircut to their latest product endorsement.

So, when a young celebrity dies of a drug overdose, it's a tragedy on many, many levels – especially on our children who usually learn about it through TV news, social media or friends.

How, then, do you explain the drug overdose to your son or daughter who admired the young star? How do you guide your child through this?



The most recent example of a young actor dying was Cory Monteith, 31, who played Finn Hudson in the TV show *Glee*. He was found dead in a Vancouver hotel room in July. Early indications were that his death was caused by an accidental overdose of alcohol and heroin.

There have been many drug-related young celebrity deaths in recent years, including Heath Ledger and Brittany Murphy. But Monteith's death was different. His untimely death affected entire families because fans of *Glee* often ranged from toddlers to teenagers as a result of the uplifting music and dancing.

When confronting your child about a celebrity death, the first thing to recognize is that the death is a teachable moment, a time to start an ongoing conversation about drugs. Studies have shown that youth who learn about the risks of drugs and alcohol from their parents are nearly 50 percent less likely to use drugs than those who do not learn from their family.

According to a recent blog by Caron Treatment Centers, several key steps parents should take following a celebrity death are:

- "Ask your child what he thought when he heard the news and express your own feelings of loss and sadness."
- "Reinforce the fact that anyone can become a chronic user and become addicted. Celebrities may make the news, but no one's immune."
- "Emphasize your child's hopes for the future and how drinking and drugs can derail those plans."
- "Show your child you care. A simple hug or shoulder squeeze says a lot."

To me, these are all important steps to take, especially having that conversation with your child about drugs.

Let's use these terrible tragedies as an opportunity to tell your child to value family, goodwill and happiness in life. Hopefully these will keep your son or daughter away from the kinds of problems that troubled Monteith and other celebrities.

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