



## The Right Dose

Has there ever been a harder time than now to be a young person struggling with a substance use issue? Drugs are everywhere and they are easy to find even when someone is not even looking. For whatever reason, the fear of the needle has subsided right along with the stigma of experimenting with heroin so there has been a huge influx of young people shooting dope all over, from the cities right on into the suburbs. As a result, most young people these days have known someone else in their extended social network who died of a heroin or other drug overdose or fatal drunk driving crash or other substance related tragedy.

Furthermore, in the current economy it's tough for a young person who is trying to turn their lives around to get a job, especially with an arrest record for drug charges or other related criminal offenses. It's even tougher in most areas for someone just starting out in life who has limited income to find affordable housing. Quite often when affordable housing is found it is smack in the middle of a drug infested area which often adds up to being just another relapse waiting to happen. Substance abusing young people of today know that even if they stop using and they get on the right track, there are no guarantees of a successful career often because of this lack of opportunity. Young people who from the start chose to go to college are often themselves still struggling as a degree no longer carries with is a guarantee of employment. So by comparison someone who went to jail for drug offenses or dropped out of high school because they were getting high may see even less available hope for making a reasonable honest living above and beyond minimum wage.

Sounds discouraging right? That's because often it is for many young people trying to change and make up for their mistakes, particularly when it comes to substance abuse and addiction. Now imagine for a second being a young person who is trying to get help hearing repeated negative messages like these:

*"At this point you should be happy you're not dead!"*

*"Those people you are hanging out with are just going to bring you down along with them eventually"*

*"Jails, institutions, or death...that's where this is all going to lead one day if you don't stop"*

*"If you haven't hit bottom yet, believe me, keep going the way you were and you sure will!"*

*"Sooner or later if you keep this up, the people who care about you are going to get tired of all of this give up on you and where will you be then?"*

*"I was young like you once and I thought I was smart too, but I'll show you what happened to me!"*



*"You need to change that negative attitude soon or you are in for a rude awakening"*

Surely, in many cases the above statements may be 100% true and many people will admit that they may need a taste of reality in order to get motivated. It is absolutely important to start learning to think of the consequences. I am not trying to undermine that fact.

Nevertheless, these young people need more than just the wakeup call associated with looking at the consequences and staring at reality. Particularly when it comes to harder drugs like heroin, users are well aware of the doom and gloom inherent consequences of that lifestyle. Those of us who are trying to help this generation of substance abusing young people must bring a crucial added ingredient to the mix. These kids have already had a pretty strong taste of reality and consequences along the way, quite often many times over before they even reach our care. Instead, something else is needed if they really are going to change for the better and stick with it. As counselors, teachers, parents, and any others in a "helping" role, let us never forget the importance of handing out several daily "doses" of the powerful anti-drug of *encouragement*. Consider for a second, exactly what encouragement means:

**Encourage** -to inspire (someone) with the courage or confidence (to do something) to stimulate (something or someone to do something) by approval or help; support

At the root of encouragement is: **courage** - the quality of mind or spirit that enables a person to face difficulty, danger, pain, etc., without fear; bravery.

**Encouragement** therefore is all about *inspiring courage in others*.

The concept of encouragement can sound like it's a huge deal but in reality, some of the best ways to dole out encouragement is by giving out subtle "doses" a little at a time. For someone who is struggling a "dose" of encouragement can be as simple as:

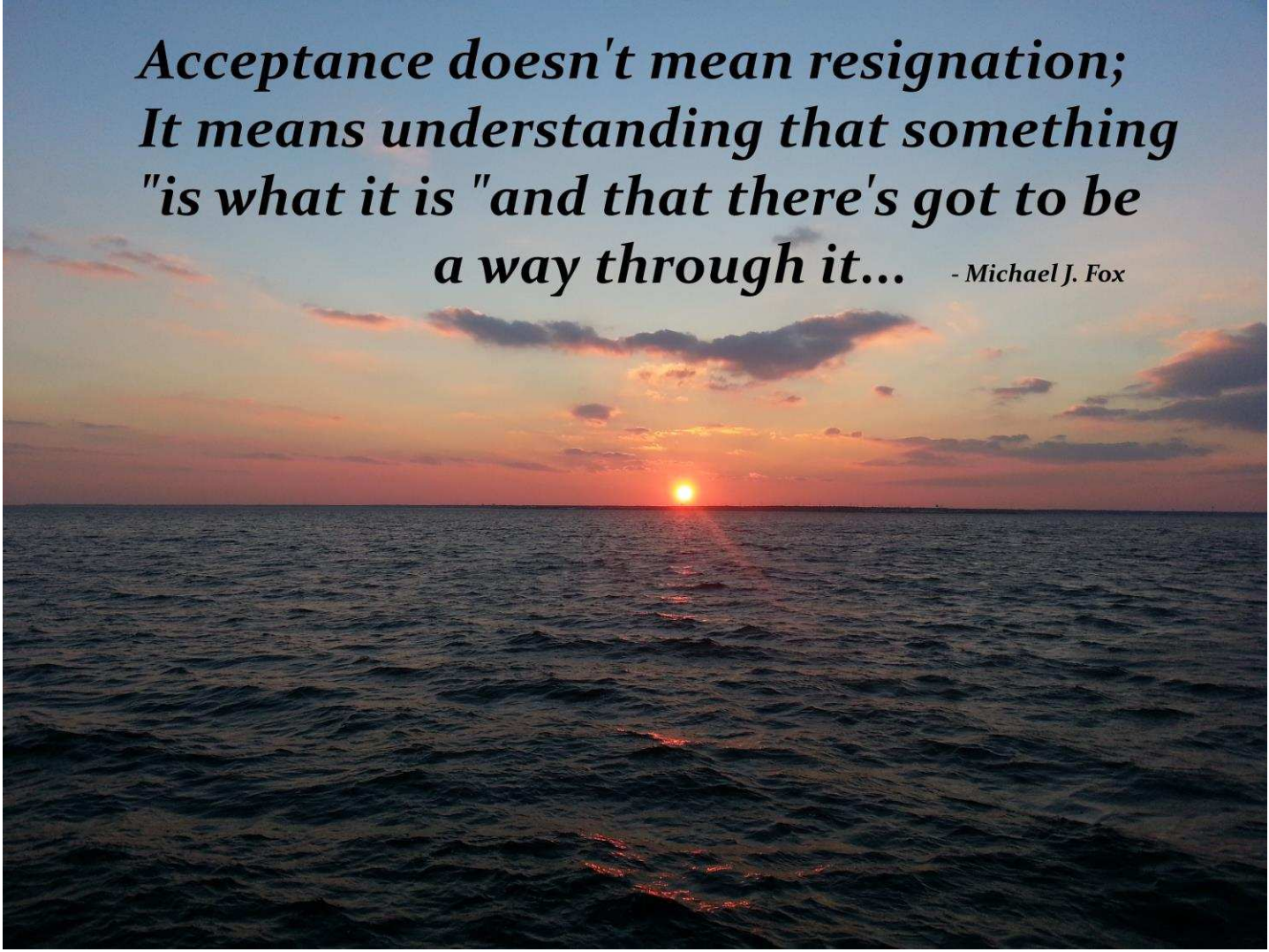
- ✚ A comforting pat on the shoulder or a welcoming handshake
- ✚ Providing a listening ear or a well-timed phone call
- ✚ Electing NOT to lecture someone after a setback or relapse
- ✚ Accepting and praising small incremental changes (baby steps) even when there is obviously still a long way to go.
- ✚ Saying just a few positive words or sending an inspiring text message or email



- ✚ Remembering to smile even when things might look bleak or appropriately using humor to diffuse a tense moment.
- ✚ Never forgetting to provide recognition, and commendation when its due, even if only in relation to the effort shown in an otherwise challenging struggle
- ✚ Always remembering to let those you speak with leave the conversation with at least one sincere, strengths-based complement or acknowledgement that they can feel good about.

The consequences are always out there and it is important not to overlook them as we teach others to avoid them. However, just as important as the consequences, is being a reliable source of lifesaving encouragement. Did you remember to give out a few doses today?

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A photograph of a sunset over the ocean. The sun is a bright orange circle on the horizon, with its light reflecting on the dark, choppy water. The sky is a mix of orange, pink, and blue, with some clouds.

*Acceptance doesn't mean resignation;  
It means understanding that something  
"is what it is "and that there's got to be  
a way through it... - Michael J. Fox*