

# Sharon



“My son, Justin, was going downhill. He was 18. He hardly went to school last year, and didn't pass his year 12.

He'd been smoking marijuana for the past year or two, I don't know how long really.

Instead of going to school, he slept in really late all the time.

He hardly did anything with the family anymore. He'd get up when we were all gone for the day, and then go to friends' houses when we came home. He'd come back after we had gone to bed, never before. If he was around he wouldn't even speak to us. He'd watch TV or play his Playstation. He wasn't helping out at all.

He would get irritable at little things. He seemed to be getting worse.

My husband was getting more frustrated and this week they ended up yelling at each other and my husband pushed him against the hallway door. Justin left and didn't come back for two days. I was frantic with worry about him.

This was when I realised I had to get help. Now that he wasn't at school, I didn't really know where to start.

I spoke to my doctor. He said the marijuana use was probably making him less motivated. He offered to speak to my son. I said to Justin, "why don't you go and have a chat to your doctor, it would be private." He just said "why would I want to go there?"

I told my doctor and he suggested contacting the local council. I found their number in the local community directory and called them.

The person that answered the phone put me through to the Youth Services' intake worker. I told them the whole story again.

They had counselling for young people, but the young person had to call them to show they were willing to come. I told her my son wouldn't call. She said there wasn't much they could do. She suggested my husband and I come for counselling. I said we'd think about it.

She suggested the youth drug and alcohol service may be able to do more 'assertive outreach'. This means they may be willing to contact Justin themselves and go out and see him. I called them and left a message. I didn't hear back for three days which annoyed me. Someone got back to me and after a couple of messages back and forth we spoke.

I told them the whole story again. They said they would call my son, and see if he would be willing to meet with one of them. I gave them Justin's mobile phone number. When I saw Justin I told him I'd contacted a service and they were going to call him. He said "why'd you give them my f...ing mobile number?!", and stormed off.

After a few days I rang the service to see what had happened. The caseworker said she'd left three messages but Justin hadn't returned the calls. She would write him a letter and that was all she could do.

A letter came a few days later from the service. I left it on my son's bed. One night when he was home I asked him "did you get that letter?" He said "yeah". I felt like I was badgering him, but I said "are you going to call her?" He just said "Dunno".

I snapped. I felt so helpless, worried and frustrated. I said "it's about f...ing time you did something". He got really angry, told me I was the problem not him, and that if I'd just leave him alone he'd be fine. He punched a hole in the wall as he stormed off from the house. He didn't come home for ages. I was in such emotional pain about my boy.

I called the caseworker again. She was really nice, but said there wasn't anything else she could do at this time. I realised I was starting to get depressed too, didn't feel like doing anything, just felt sad and upset all the time.

She gave me the number of another counselling service, who would see families. I put it off but it was the only thing I could think of that might help me feel better.

I called and said to the receptionist "I have a son with problems and need to talk to someone". I was put through to the 'Assessment' worker. They asked me to tell them what was happening and I told them the story. They said I would be put on a waiting list and a counsellor would call me when they had a free spot. They said it would be good if my husband came too. I was told it might be three weeks before I heard from someone.

I spoke to my husband about it and he said I should go first and if it helped, he'd try to go.

The first session, I told the counsellor about the situation (again) and a bit of background about our family. I cried all through it. She talked about what might be going on for Justin. This helped me get into my son's headspace a little more and understand what he may be struggling with.

I met with the counsellor a few more times. There were no magic answers, but it did help to talk it through, and I was dealing with it all better. She gave me the details of parent groups for parents like me, and a 24-hour phone number I could call if I needed support.

Reluctantly, my husband agreed to go to a group. I think he was feeling bad about pushing Justin, and was missing having a relationship with him.

The group was great. We are handling things a lot better. Justin hasn't changed a lot, but I can see signs that he is more willing to talk to us again. I try to just have normal conversations with him, like we have been able to talk about a TV show we both watch. He even showed a bit of interest when my husband said he'd take him to the footy some time.

I don't know what is going to happen for my son, but I am glad I persisted and got some help for me, even if my son isn't ready to talk to someone yet.



### Related Help Sheets

- What Went Wrong? Why?
- Adolescent Development
- Understanding Drug Use
- When Your Life is on Hold
- Keeping Calm
- Improving Communication
- Need a Helping Hand?

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