Jody Brown: “I am not alone anymore”

Jody Brown is an amazing advocate for women that are new in recovery. She is a woman who knows what it means to be empowered. She had the courage to turn a trauma-filled life to a life of joyful service. Jody began using drugs at the very young age of nine. She said, “Growing up in the ’70s, I was surrounded by a culture where I felt it would have been hard not to be into drugs.” At the young age of 14, Jody went through a traumatic experience and attempted suicide. Her life continued to spiral downward as her addiction progressed. “The lowest point in my life is when I was homeless, discovered I was pregnant, and then lost my two oldest children to a divorce. It was at that time I was on the missing persons list for many years,” said Jody.

Jody abused drugs during her pregnancies with her two youngest children. Jody said, “At the time, I knew it was dangerous to use drugs while pregnant, but I did not fully understand the consequences and did not think it would have a long-term effect. I used drugs to cope, and to avoid facing the reality that I was pregnant.”

Jody was dependent upon government services, particularly welfare, when she had her fourth child. Her real turning point was when her fourth child tested positive for cocaine after birth.

Fortunately, she found recovery and support in the Parent Child Assistance Program (P-CAP). She was able to care for her children and remained involved with P-CAP for many years. Through this program she found NOFAS and the Circle of Hope Birth Mothers Network. Jody says, “I feel that it is my responsibility to advocate for prevention and educate people on the issues of women and addiction to alcohol and other drugs, especially while pregnant. “Honestly, I still feel a deep regret and guilt for my past, but I’ve learned to live one day at a time,” said Jody. She said, “Because of the Circle of Hope Birth Mothers Network, I am not alone anymore.” Jody has been clean for ten years.

"Only when I was able to accept myself unconditionally was I able to truly love."

- Alison Stormwolf

For the new reader:

You are not alone. If you are a woman who used substances while pregnant, or who has a child with FASD contact the COH. We will connect you to a Warrior Mom; a mentor who has been down a similar path.

Join other Warrior Moms on Facebook!
To join our private FB site, email Kathy at mitchell@nofas.org

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What is Circle of Hope?

The Circle of Hope (COH) is a support group for women who have consumed alcohol during pregnancy and/or have a child or children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). The COH is here to provide you with:
• Referrals and resources
• Factual information about FASD and addiction
• Support for you and your family

Jody Brown and her two sons
Overcoming Shame: Making Connections Is The Key, Says Researcher

Shame is a healthy internal alarm that we all experience when we violate our family, societal, or personal values. Women that have suffered with addictions typically experience a great deal of shame. New members to the Circle of Hope are often paralyzed with shame and remorse. Once they connect with other women, the shame they experience is often replaced with a strong desire to tell others about their experiences. Members of the Circle of Hope all share a common desire: TO PREVENT FUTURE ALCOHOL EXPOSED PREGNANCIES! The stories of the birth moms can serve as a powerful prevention tool in FASD prevention. Researcher Jessica Van Vliet's study on shame indicated that while it may seem difficult when one is stuck in shame, there is hope for moving beyond this painful emotion. "Shame can prompt us to make changes that will help protect our relationships. It's important to emphasize that shame is essential and has value," said Van Vliet. "The problem is when people get paralyzed with shame and withdraw from others. Not only can this create mental-health problems for people, but also they no longer contribute as fully to society."

Van Vliet's research shows that people who feel debilitated by shame seem resigned to being unable to change their feelings or their fate. "When people experience shame, they may say to themselves 'I'm to blame, it's all my fault, all of me is bad, and there's nothing I can do to change the situation,'" said Van Vliet. "They identify so much with shame that it takes over their entire view of themselves. That leads to an overwhelming feeling of powerlessness."

Van Vliet notes that one of the key components to overcoming these feelings is to step back from the problem and view the picture in a different light. "When people move from a sense of uncontrolliability to the belief that maybe there's something they can do about their situation, such as making amends for their actions, it starts increasing a sense of hope for the future," she said. Van Vliet found that one of the key steps to overcoming a profound sense of shame is making connections, be it with family and friends, a higher power, or humanity as a whole.

"Connecting to others helps to increase self-acceptance, and with self-acceptance can come a greater acceptance of other people as well," said Van Vliet. "People start to realize that it's not just them. Other people have made mistakes or have done things that they regret too. They start to say to themselves, 'This is human, I am human, others are human.' I am not the world’s worst person.

Prevent Relapse: Present FASD

In the rooms of recovery, we say that a relapse begins long before a person picks up the drink or the drug. According to Terry Gorsky, an expert in addiction and relapse, we are either working on recovery or working on relapse. Knowing your warning signs of relapse, can prevent FASD. Gorsky developed the 10 common warning signs of a relapse below:

1. **Internal Change:** I Look good on the outside but am in turmoil on the inside.
2. **Denial:** I say everything is fine when it really isn’t and start shutting people out.
3. **Avoidance and Defensiveness:** I avoid people who are honest with me and become angry with them.
4. **Crisis Building:** Ordinary problems become overwhelming and I can’t solve them.
5. **Immobilization:** I feel like there is no where to turn and no way out, I feel like giving up.
6. **Confusion and Overreaction:** I have trouble managing my thoughts and emotions and become easily angered.
7. **Depression:** I can’t do the things I normally do and feel that life is not worth living.
8. **Loss of Control:** I feel powerless and lose traces of myself.
9. **Thinking about Relapse:** Alcohol and other drugs will solve my problems.
10. **Relapse:** I drink again to solve my problems, but it doesn’t and I spiral out of control until I realize that I need to get help.

“We are both burdened and blessed by the great responsibility of free will-the power of choice. Our future is determined, in large part, by the choices we make now. We cannot always control our circumstances, but we can and do choose our response to whatever arises.

Reclaiming the power of choice, we find the courage to live fully in the world”

- Dan Millman

Did you know…

- Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) refer to the range of disorders that can occur when a pregnant woman drinks alcohol while pregnant. The disorders can include physical effects as well as effects on the brain that may result in problems with learning, emotions and behavior.
- Alcohol is the most harmful drug for a developing baby. It is even worse than cigarettes, heroine, cocaine or crack.
- There is no known safe amount of alcohol to drink during pregnancy.
- When a pregnant woman drinks, her unborn child gets the same concentration of alcohol as the mother. FASD is preventable by not drinking while pregnant.
- FASD is the leading preventable cause of intellectual disability, birth defects, and a leading known cause of learning disabilities. You can prevent FASD by not drinking while pregnant.