

My Son's Vaping Nightmare

I am a concerned mother and a parent volunteer with PAVE (Parents Against Vaping), and I support ending the sale of all flavored vaping products and the speedy passage of **SB 177**.

Less than a year ago my son, an honor roll student and a dual sport varsity athlete tried vaping flavored nicotine for the first time. He said it tasted great, cherry being one of his favorites. He liked the flavors not just for the taste but also because he could easily hide it from me by passing it off as if he were just eating candy.

The candy odor was a sign, like so many others. The flash drives, that were vape devices. The stripped USB cords that were being used to hot wire his devices for charging, the empty pods, cartridges, and e-juice containers. There were so many signs, but even I as a self-proclaimed "Helicopter Mom" and someone who stays informed, did not see what was happening. It was not until months later, at which point my son had now been vaping for 3 months, every day, 4 to 5 times a day.

I could not believe Jacob had gotten caught up in this vaping epidemic after many discussions and his reassurance that he would never vape because he was an athlete, and he did not want to mess up his lungs. How did this happen when he knew the dangers? How did this happen when the age limit was now over 21? But it did and now he could not stop, he craved it every day all day.

His mood swings, his panic attacks, his failing grades, his troubles in school with detention and suspension, his lack of motivation, his depression, his lies, his desperation...it was all there.

There are events that neither Jacob nor I will soon forget...

Like the day he called me from a locked bathroom stall at school having a panic attack because he knew if he left the stall, he would vape with the other kids who were vaping in the bathroom as they do every day all day.

Then there was the night I watched and listened to my son who was crying uncontrollably and asking me through gut wrenching sobs “Mom, why is this happening to me? Why did I ever start vaping?” and then the next minute screaming with anger as he’s punching his bedroom dresser yelling “Mom, what is wrong with me? Why can’t I stop?”

This healthy strong young high school boy with a 4.13 GPA and AMAZING athletic abilities was no longer the boy I knew as my son. Vaping was now ruling his life both mentally and physically. The addiction took over and it had complete control of him.

Sadly, the physical effects of vaping were just as great as the emotional effects. Jacob, a starter player on varsity who usually played the entire game, was now having problems getting through a whole game because he could not breathe. He was even having breathing issues with simple things like gym class or a friendly community basketball game. No parent should have to watch their child gasp for breath like Jacob did on a field THAT he once dominated.

We are hoping over time his breathing will improve and this too, like the addiction, will just be a bad memory.

Jacob is working hard to stay in control, he wants to be stronger than the addiction. He recognized that his life was spiraling out of control. He will openly admit he regrets the day he tried vaping; he knows firsthand how bad the cravings are and how difficult it is to quit. But despite all this, he still finds himself craving the feeling he gets from vaping and unfortunately those craving are so strong he still struggles daily. Sadly, just a couple of weeks ago I found several empty menthol cartridges, his “New” favorite flavor. Yes, menthol is a flavor, and it is in fact one of the most popular flavors that is attracting our children.

I do not want any other child to have to deal with the addiction my son, Jacob is still dealing with. His story is an important one because...

People need to understand how quickly the addiction happens.

People need to understand how difficult it is to stop.

People need to understand the severe negative effects of vaping, both mentally and physically.

These flavors draw kids into vaping, the extremely high levels of nicotine addicts them and keeps them coming back for more. This epidemic is not going away if our kids are able to buy flavored nicotine products and that is exactly what is happening. The age restriction of 21 is not always enforced. The only way to end this is to remove ALL flavors. We can do this in Maryland NOW with the passage of **SB 177** which is a total flavor ban on all flavored tobacco products and e-cigs.

It is time to protect our children from this deadly habit.