**Babysitter linked to close call in Ohio** page 2-a

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# Rap sessions with family help all

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*Third in a Series*

Soon after the open meeting of Straight Inc. adjourns (story, page 1-b), the neat rows of blue chairs are dispersed into groups of four and five. Parents and siblings eagerly await the arrival of the youngster and look forward to their five-minute conversation. It's a time for making amends.

First, second and third phase parents congregate in the Commitment Room for their rap, while fourth and fifth phase parents are able to go home because their once-a-month rap with their children is scheduled at another time.

New parents to the program gather in the Awareness Room for a first in a series of six new parent raps. In these raps, parents learn about chemical dependency and about how that dependency has affected the family. It's their basic orientation into the program and how it works.

Ed Stack, executive staff trainee, leads the rap.

Stack explains Straight's philosophy of drug use as a disease of the feelings. Drug use is the primary illness; drug use is on-going and noncurable; drug use gets progressively worse in four stages; and drug use is terminal.

Stack then asks the group, "How do you feel about being here?"

One woman relates, "I feel relieved. I don't have to worry about police calling or knocking at the door late at night. I know where my child is. And I don't have

A man relates, "I don't want to be here. I've worked hard my whole life and tried to do the right thing. And I don't know why I have to be here. I didn't do anything wrong."

One woman says, "I feel a little guilty because we lied to him. We didn't tell him where we were taking him. I guess I feel guilty because he was so sweet that last day."

A man relates, "I lied to my son. I told him we were going to see a counselor. Yeah, I lied. And I'd lie and do anything else if it meant saving my kid's life."

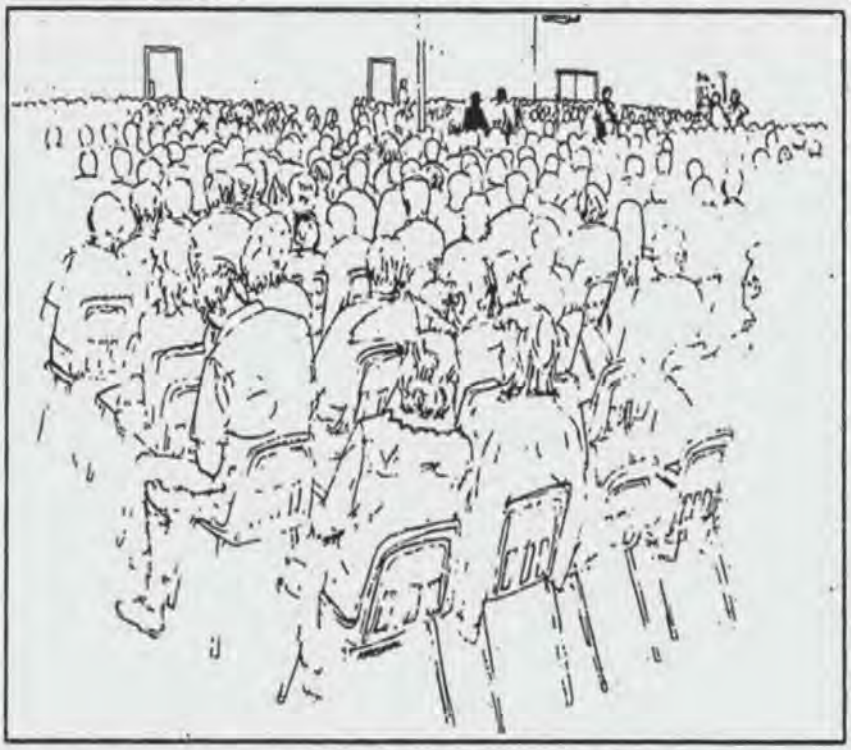
Stack says, "All of you made a life-and-death decision. The end result of drug use is death. How many of your kids are in the first stage of the disease where a child is just learning he can produce a good feeling by using drugs? The second, where he starts to actively seek these feelings by planned use of drugs? The third, where getting high becomes the sole obsession and preoccupation of his life? (Most raise their hands.) The fourth, where he uses drugs just to feel normal?"

One woman relates: "My son is in the third phase. He didn't even pretend to be straight anymore. And you know, we moved from a bigger city to a smaller one because we thought it would be better for our kids. If only. . . ."

Stack interrupts, "You think it's your fault, don't you? Well, it's not your fault. You didn't make your kid take drugs. That was something he decided to do on his own. You didn't knock him to the ground, put your foot on his neck and make him take a puff off a joint."

Another woman relates: "You did what you thought was best. My family went to church every Sunday and was involved in church activities during the week. We found out later that's where my girl was getting her drugs — from church. Drugs are everywhere. It doesn't matter where you go."

Stack asks, "How many of you felt like you were going crazy? How many of you feel resentment toward your druggie kid? And how many of you just felt like



Sketches by Lee Kershner, reprinted from brochures with the permission of Straight Inc.

running away? These feelings are normal. A person who is chemically dependent makes a home a place of lunacy."

Stack asks, "How many of you thought your kid was crazy, so you took him to see a psychiatrist?"

Most raise hands.

One man relates: "The doctor virtually told us that Don's problem was our fault. He told us we were being too strict and we needed to give him more room and responsibility."

Stack asks: "How many of you thought about getting rid of your druggie?"

A parent volunteer relates: "All of our family's problems were because of him. He just disrupted all of our lives. It seemed like we were all crazy. I just thought if I could get rid of him, all of our problems would be solved. I wondered if there was something I could put in his food that wouldn't be effective for a couple of hours so it couldn't be traced to me. That's how crazy things got."

Stack says: "Those feelings are normal and you need to get those feelings out. You need to tell your child how you feel, not lecture or complain to him. Deal with him in feelings, not concepts.

"Your children are relearning to relate their feelings. As a druggie, they think in terms of things. They have pushed their feelings down. And you, as a druggie's parent, have pushed a lot of your feelings down to try to keep peace in the family. You're in this program along with your child. They are relearning the process of being a feeling person. And we won't ask your child to do anything we won't ask you to do."

After their raps, parents gather their materials and go home. The young people return home or to an oldcomer's home.

# Day by day

***Each day at Straight Inc. begins and ends with a song. The songs are like bookends, instruments that keep material between them upright.***

The young people sit up straight as they did last night; boys on one side, girls on another. One learns from trial an error that the only way to sit comfortably on these hard, blue chairs is to slide your hips all the way back into the chair and slightly tilt your trunk forward. Most have learned the secret. Those who haven't, squirm most of the day trying to find the right combination.

Most of the girls wear summer slacks and blouses. Their hair is neatly combed and held away from their faces with rubber bands, barrettes or combs. Cosmetics don't cover their faces. Jewelry doesn't jiggle from their ears or necks. Straight took these things away from them when they entered the program.

The boys wear slacks with shirts that have collars. White T-shirts, T-shirts with pictures or writing, muscle shirts and thongs are not allowed. For the most part, their hair is cut short and parted on one side. A few newcomers continue wearing their hair long, but day after day of looking different from the group takes it toll. They soon will decide to get their hair cut.

In front of the group are the Seven Steps and two rap leaders. To the sides and back stand Fifth Phasers. They are young people who have worked hard and have earned the right to stand as examples, says Dr. Miller Newton, clinical director of Straight.

Orange partitions now divide in two this auditorium-like room that served as a meeting place last night. For most of the day, the air conditioning remains idle, but the doors are propped open as a remedy to the heat. Nevertheless, the young people become damp with perspiration. The staff perspires along with them.

"You're not going to find any pool tables or swimming pools here," says one Seventh Stepper. "Straight is tough. But, then, life is tough."

* * *

During four raps a day, young people talk about themselves under the supervision of staff members.

Some talk honestly, some not so honestly. For the latter, the demon of denial is at work. But there is always someone willing to demonstrate the principles of tough love, ready to help penetrate the denial, the conning, the dishonesty.

When a young person enters the program, Straight strips him of his drugs and all of those things associated with the drug culture. There is nothing tangible to hold onto. No drugs. No druggie friends. No druggie clothes.

But a druggie's image of himself as a druggie remains.

A Fifth Phaser says it's a matter of the group helping a person break down a druggie image that grows inside a person's head, spreads to the outside, hardens like cement, leaving the real person and his feelings trapped inside.

The twisted details of his past — the drugs he took, the activities he was involved with while he was on drugs, how he messed up his schooling and destroyed his family relationship — are constantly thrown in his face.

The facts. The *unadulterated* facts.

The newcomer doesn't relate the first three days. This gives him an idea of how the group operates. After he hears people talking about themselves and their pasts, he isn't as afraid to talk about himself.

At first, most newcomers just tell true stories, says one Seventh Stepper. They give the group information about incidents, but they don't tell how they feel about what happened.

"But they are talking about themselves and their pasts and that's a beginning. After they start really opening up to the group, and start getting the positive feedback, then they feel more confident about themselves," says the Seventh Stepper.

* * *

On Monday and Friday mornings, the rap is called Homes. It's during this rap that young people who believe they have worked hard enough to earn a status change apply for the change.

A young person brings his request before the group, his peers. Judging from his performance the previous few weeks or days, they state their opinions about his progress. They vote on it. Executive staff members consider the group vote, the newcomer's progress reports (which are written by his "oldcomer"), when they make the final decision.

Members of the group find out about their status changes in the moments before open meeting starts.

Today, during Girls' Homes, Kathy has been in the program for 14 days and she asks for talk (permission to talk with her parents for five minutes after open meeting).

The group responds.

One girls says: "In order for you to talk to your parents, you have to talk to us. You haven't shared about yourself. You have to share your past."

Another girl says: "When I earned talk, I talked about my past. You haven't. I see you coming in here acting all timid and shy. We know you're not like that at all. We're all druggies and we have bad attitudes and you're not bringing that out."

And another: "I don't see you talking in group. No one is going to push you along here. You just better get off your a-- and start working."

Although her peers vote that she has earned nothing, they continue to show their support by saying, "Love you, Kathy."

Dawna has been in the program for 45 days and she ask for talk.

The group responds.

One girl says: "There's no way you deserve talk. This morning you told a Fifth Phaser that you wanted to be pulled from the program."

Dawna admits the statement is true. She says, "I don't want to give in. I don't like it here. I don't think I deserve to be here. I just want to go home."

Rap leader says: "Go home? You can't go home. You're parents told you at open meeting they don't want you home until you get straight. I'm offended because you think this is a big joke. But, you know, you're the joke. You're sitting here 17 years old in a drug rehab program and you don't have anything."

The group votes that she earn nothing.

"Love you, Dawna."

Tina has been in the program for 62 days and asks for nothing.

The group responds.

One girl says: "I don't believe you. You've been here 62 days. You should have earned home by now. What the h--- is wrong with you? Do you like being on first phase? Do you like having someone carry you around by the belt loops? Do you like not talking to your parents? If you want to get out of here, you better get moving."

Another: "You've been in the program that long and I still don't know anything about you. You're still holding onto that druggie boyfriend of yours. He's in jail and he can't do anything for you. All he did was use you anyway. You need to talk about your past to blow it away."

And another: "You ask for nothing and we'll give you nothing. You must really enjoy your peanut butter diet."

The group votes that she earn nothing.

"Love you, Tina."

Shayla has been in the program for 80 days and she asks for Second Phase, during which the child returns home to live.

The group responds.

One girl says: "I feel good about you. I see you really opening up to the group and sharing your feelings and I think you deserve home."

Another: "You've made a lot of changes since you got here, and I feel good about that. I can see you working hard trying to make changes and I think you're ready to start working on your family relationship."

And another: "I can see the changes you've made. Your face is starting to soften up and your eyes even look shiny. I think you're ready to go home."

The group votes that she earn the right to go home.

"Love you, Shayla."

**Bettinita Harris is a staff writer for the *Evening Independent*.**