

# CRACK IS HOW THE LIGHT GETS IN: Trauma and Resiliency Among Youth Who Smoke Crack

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Risk, Resilience and Best Practices: Meeting the Needs of People Who Use Drugs  
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# Cycle of Trauma and Resiliency



## Experiences of Trauma and/or Abuse

*“My mom’s religious. She believes that gays can’t be trusted around the dog, that they’re pedophiles and all that. So that really defaced me as a human being – I had no dignity for myself.”*

*“I don’t have a relationship with my family. My dad killed himself when I was 2, and two of my uncles, they all did it together, and ever since my mom, she’s just been a crazy drug addict, alcoholic, depressed, I don’t really talk to her.”*

*“I don’t like yellors. It’s a phobia I have from when I was a kid. My mom like yelling at me, beating me up and shit.”*

*“You know especially growing up with parents who are alcoholics. You know, living that life, having to hide and pretend stuff.”*

## Falling through the cracks

*"I'm not involved with CAS because I'm adopted from another country."*

*"I got placed in a group home at age 6, yeah, and then I was back and forth, mom, dad, mom, dad, my whole life so that shook me a bit. So that's when like, you start to think people don't really care about you, especially if you're not getting very much attention."*

*"No, (CAS was never involved), because of how good we are – we're good actors you know what I mean, my family? We were good at playing the regular family."*

## Alone in a dark place

*“She (mom) really cut me deep one time, cuz she was doing good and she was almost going to get me and then she just went drinking and she called me and she was drunk and she told me that I’d have to wait until I was 16 to get out, and that broke my heart. It broke, broke, broke my heart, and then I just freaked out.”*

*“I was molested by my therapist at the beginning of it. My Children’s Aid worker, when I spoke to her about it, I was very sad – I was actually in tears – she told me that I was lying and there’s no way this could happen ... all this stuff just led to me loosing total respect for myself.”*

*“I don’t think anyone really noticed at that point, because my parents were divorcing, so they were kind of not really noticing what I was up to anyway.”*

## Forging Connections

*“They became my friends, they were people I could trust. I felt a bit more connected we could have a conversation, relax, laugh. To me it was family. The street became my family since I was 13, since the day I was old enough to look up to another person.”*

*“These people under the bridge they feel like they care, they want to be my brother, they want to be my friend – you know what I mean? And that’s when I started sleeping under that bridge – you know they were like my family, the family I never had, the people that accepted me or didn’t belittle me or insult me or make me feel stupid... because, like my parents did – you know, in front of all my friends.”*

## Pressure Release

*"I was always fighting. I started fighting when I was a little kid because I got made fun of you know? I just didn't take nobody's crap you know what I mean? Because I got tired... It was either gonna be me or them, and I was tired of being hurt. I was tired of being that person. So you know I took it out on them until I realized that I could use drugs, that I could take it out on drugs."*

*"We're like pressure tanks, like air compressors you know. Our bodies start to build up pressure you know, and it's things like crack that we so easily turn to because it's the quickest and best pressure release in the world."*

## Reframing Re-victimization

*"I had to work the streets from 7 to 7 the next morning... I thought 'I need this, I need money, I can't allow people'... I did that before when I was young and I'm gonna do it and their not gonna hurt me because I've been hurt before and this is not affecting my life because I've been... I've done... I've been through it since I was young."*

*"I was on the street, I was in shelters, I was physically abused for being gay. I took to the bathhouses because I felt I wouldn't be physically abused there but men would touch me more than I wanted to."*

*"I'm choosing to live the street life because I'm so used to it and I feel like it's my ...that it's my way out."*

## Trapped

*“From 16 to the age I am right now, you get introduced to a lot more stuff – like crack houses and trap houses – we call them ‘trap houses’ because it puts you in an environment where you feel you’re comfortable but you’re not.”*

*“Like I have nowhere to live so I’d like be staying with mostly guys and I’d just end up sleeping with them. I have a problem saying ‘no’ or something... I really can’t explain. It even feels awkward when I’m doing it, I just shut down, I don’t know, I can’t say no. I’m so easily influenced. Like I won’t even want to sleep with you but I will because I’m high or drunk.”*

*“He was like a sugar daddy, he was helping me out, took me under his wings. Sometimes I had to make some money so I had to, ya... I had to please him and please other people.”*

## Escape

*“It was very enjoyable, it allowed me to release and just escape everything that had happened, all the horrors I had to basically witness throughout my entire life. I still live with that today, my past is very hard to accept. I always say I don’t want to regret things but there are a lot of things I wish had never happened.”*

*“It felt like for 15, 20 seconds I felt like nothing was ever going to get better than that moment – ever.”*

*“I’m living in the now, not then, the then will kill me.”*

## Treatment and Support Services

*“I was (in treatment) for 47 days and then I got kicked out...cause I wasn't able to... well, I was speaking but... I just wasn't ready, I was too emotional to talk about my shit... So I got kicked out and was back at the shelter. I lasted two and half days and then I relapsed.”*

*“My buddy's HIV and me and her we shared a needle – I only had dirty ones - it was Easter Monday so there was nothing open. We both used the same needle... she went first.”*

*“This is one of the places that saved me – because they come to you and you could be high, drunk or whatever and they'll say ‘Need help? No? okay.’ Next time: ‘You need help?’ No. ‘You need help?’ ‘You need help?’ No. You need help?’ They just keep putting their hand out.”*

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