

## Our Story

Our oldest son, Alex, died of an accidental heroin/fentanyl overdose on his 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday, in December, 2015.

Other parents and the students we spoke with at Alex's high school asked us many questions but the two most common were "How could this happen?" and "How can I prevent it from happening to my child or my friend?"

In the wake of Alex's passing, our family analyzed the path that Alex, and we, had gone down. Alex did not fit society's stereotype of an addict. It was like a slow-motion movie of a car skidding and then violently crashing. We looked at every frame, from every angle, to try to understand exactly how and when things went so wrong. We thought back to high school when Alex told us, unprompted, that he had been drinking with his friends. He didn't want to lie to us. To college and signs of trouble that we did not heed. And to the two-year period from Alex's first use of opiates to when he died.

People who go down the path of addiction, and their loved ones, know pain that is difficult to describe to others. And the specific effects of heroin and other opiates on the user have brought this pain to a new level. No individual, or family, should experience the path of addiction.

We decided to focus on prevention in our efforts to help others. While there is increasing attention on helping those who are addicted, which is wonderful, there's not enough content on how to prevent addiction...on how to avoid going down this path in the first place.

On Facebook, our family saw a beautiful and effective animated video on autism, called "Amazing Things Happen". We decided that people could benefit from a clear video on addiction: how it starts, how it develops, and how to try to prevent it altogether. We reached out to the creator of "Amazing Things Happen", Alex Amelines, and he was very gracious in communicating his experience.

There are excellent books written by professionals about addiction. This video is not meant to replace these books. Instead it is designed to communicate a basic framework to teens and parents, so that they can recognize patterns of behavior and take action early.

The video's key messages to parents are: (1) addiction can happen to any child, (2) be aware of the factors that put a child at greater risk, and (3) **spend regular, concentrated, one-on-one time with your child and CAREFULLY LISTEN**. Listen with love and without judgement. Understand what they are going through. What is happening in their life. Your child needs, and wants, a true relationship with you. For some teens, addiction can spring from a lot to cope with and, through no fault of their own, poor coping skills. There can be depression, anxiety, or neurodivergence. For other teens, it can be a matter of seeking thrills and having the genetics and brain chemistry that make them more susceptible to addiction. It can be that simple...and scary. That last scenario was the case with our son.

The video's key messages to teens are: (1) that they are not alone, and (2) it's ok to be open to receiving help. Whatever a teen is going through, others have also gone through it and come out well on the other end. Teens can be comfortable with their own thoughts. With who they are. They can be happy.