



SEEKING THAT NATURAL HIGH

By // Michelle Talsma Everson

When entrepreneur Jon Sundt lost both of his brothers to drug addiction, he became determined to spend the rest of his life helping others make better choices. To do so, he founded Natural High, a national nonprofit that “inspires and empowers youth to find their natural high and develop the skills and courage to live life well.”

According to the organization, Sundt realized that simply shifting the way we engage youth could dispel the myth around drugs and alcohol. He began traveling to schools with local influencers and a slide projector at his side, hoping that his story could help save even one life.

Two decades later, Natural High has impacted the lives of more than 8 million youth across the globe through the power of storytelling.

“A natural high is something you are, something you do, something you believe in,” Sundt told *The San Diego Union-Tribune*. “The more natural highs, the better.”

The organization believes that once young people get to know the stories and examples of those who have found their own Natural High, they are inspired to do the same.

In the article, the cornerstone of the program was described as “a series of short videos made by celebrities and youth ambassadors—including athletes and

artists—who talk about their own natural highs, with the idea of inspiring teens to seek out and pursue things they are passionate about. The nonprofit has also developed classroom materials including worksheets and discussion guides, which can be used to follow up on the messages from the videos. All of the materials are provided free to schools, and the curriculum has been distributed nationwide.”

Natural High focuses on six core principles:

- 1 Pursue your natural high** – Inspire youth to find their passion, get involved and show them it’s a better choice.
- 2 Embrace positive peer influence** – Empower youth through social norming to understand that many cultural icons, as well as their peers, choose their natural high over drug and alcohol abuse.
- 3 Cultivate mentor relationships** – Youth who have caring, supportive relationships with adults and mentors are more likely to develop perseverance and motivation.
- 4 Believe in yourself** – Youth who believe they can achieve their goals through hard work are inspired to work harder.
- 5 Set goals** – Youth who set goals learn to avoid taking poorly thought out short-term actions and develop a more positive and motivated outlook in life.

6 Develop resilience – The ability to rebound from a challenge or obstacle is key to a young person’s ability to thrive.

According to Natural High, these core principles are all based on scientific studies and research.

Thirteen is the average age of first-time drug and alcohol use, according to the website. “Nine out of 10 addictions start in the teen years. There is no national programming in schools to teach youth about drug and alcohol abuse. At Natural High, we understand drug and alcohol prevention. We use a multi-faceted approach based on science and common sense. We teach youth essential life skills and apply the most effective protective factors through powerful storytellers and well-designed content.”

Natural High provides their content and action steps to educators and influencers, and their content often meets Common Core standards. The target audience is junior high-level youth, but the stories are relevant to high school students, as well. [M](#)

MORE INFORMATION

Educators, influencers and parents interested in utilizing Natural High’s free resources, or for more information, visit naturalhigh.org