

photo by Corynne Hogan and photo art by Jami Bechard

Smoking, hazardous to your reputation

Children with parents who smoke try to escape the smoking stigma

Corynne Hogan | Staff Writer

With health lectures and D.A.R.E programs at Mason High School devoted to educating students about the risks of smoking, most students are aware of the dangers of the hazardous addiction. Although some students opt out of smoking, others are forced to face this struggle within their own households.

According to The United Health Foundation, the percentage of smokers in Ohio has risen from 20.3 to 22.5 in the past year, despite the banning of indoor smoking and the overt warnings for the dangers of this habit.

Sophomore Collin Kehoe, whose parents smoke on a daily basis, said he believes that the heightened rate in smoking roots from America's shaky economy.

"With the economy being the way it is, you're [going to] have a higher stress rate," Kehoe said. "So you will have more people going to different forms of 'happiness,' like addiction and drug abuse. Tobacco could be one of those [outlets]."

Kehoe, although not supportive of his father's and step-mother's choice to smoke, said he remains neutral on how he feels towards his parents decisions. He said that regardless of whether he agrees or disagrees, ultimately, it's their choice.

"I don't negate the fact that they do [smoke, and] I don't support it [either]," Kehoe said. "[But] I [remain] neutral on the subject...because I know that it is [their] addiction. [Consequently, it's] hard to stop. I like to push their ideals to stop, but I also don't like [that] it's very stressful for them [to stop], so I don't want to put them in that position as well."

Sophomore Brittany Cruse, whose mother is addicted to

smoking, said she is ultimately very concerned for her mother's health.

"Cancer runs in both sides of my family," Cruse said. "Seeing some of my grandparents die from cancer [was] really hard [because I had] to see them suffer. My grandma had breast cancer. I remember going to her house and seeing her cry from the pain and just [watching] how much it hurt [her]. ...I don't want [my mom] to get cancer because...it's really hard on the family. ...I just wouldn't be able to take it [if she died]."

Although his parents themselves smoke, Kehoe said that both his parents realize it's unhealthy and discourage him and his sister from using.

"[My parents] are more parental about [not smoking]," Kehoe said. "They know that it is bad for you and they don't want us to start doing [it], so they're more cautious of it. ...[My mom] had a bad high school life dealing with smoking and I guess she just doesn't want it to effect [me and my sister's] lives [either]."

According to Kehoe, he doesn't think people should make judgments about him because of his parent's addictions to smoking.

"I don't care [how people perceive me] at all because it's a widely used thing," Kehoe said. "If [my parents] were [publically] shooting up heroin, then yes, I would be kind of concerned about image, but I kind of think that everyone should [understand that] it's [their] choices."

Not only does Cruse worry for her mother's health, but for her emotional state as well.

"People are really judgmental about smokers," Cruse said. "They [will say to smokers,] 'It's unhealthy, so why would you do that? You're uneducated and unintelligent.' So I worry...if people say something that's sarcastic or rude [to my mom, how] that makes her feel."

Penelope Cruse, the mother of Brittany Cruse, said she considers smoking just a habit of hers rather than an addiction. Penelope said she smokes, on average, a pack

a day and she's been smoking since her mid-high school years.

Penelope said that her habit originated out of the curiosity as to why everyone else was smoking. She said at the time of when she started smoking, tobacco didn't have the same stigma as it does now. She said now looking back, she holds regret for her decision to start and aspires to quit.

According to Penelope, her habit of smoking plays out to have only a few minor effects on the household. She said that it's something she has always done and her family has grown up with it.

"I don't disregard [my family's] feelings for me smoking, it's just a part of our life," Penelope said. "Brittany was born with me smoking, as well as our other children. It's not that I [smoke] because I'm selfish—I enjoy smoking. It's just one of the things I do. ...It's really the only thing I do that my family doesn't like."

Penelope said she never thought about the hazards of smoking, or was directed to see them, until she started nursing school.

"When I was in nursing school, I was on the cancer floor," Penelope said. "[I saw] a lot of people [in] chemo or radiation [therapy]. That was the moment when I realized that it wasn't the greatest thing in the world to be doing."

According to Penelope, she said she feels as though people label her off as a hard and self-seeking individual, rather than attempting to see who she really is as a person.

"When people hear that [I smoke,] there's automatically a stigma," Penelope said. "[They say,] 'Oh you have to be that person because you do those things,' but that's not necessarily true. ...I don't think I have the stereotype that [others] label [me] with. I'm probably the complete opposite. I'm a caring, selfless, giving person, but others think, 'She has to be selfish since she [smokes].' I have [this] label that is not who I am."

