

This MAPS Bulletin is the third in a series of themed issues edited by Jon Hanna and Sylvia Thyssen. The first in the series was our Psychedelics & Creativity issue (Vol. 10, No. 3, Autumn 2000), followed a year and a half later by our Sex, Spirit and Psychedelics issue (Vol. 12, No. 1, Spring 2002), now followed two and a half years later by this Rites of Passage: Kids and Psychedelics issue. These special issues give us the opportunity to explore intriguing topics at length and from a variety of perspectives, in contrast to the regular MAPS Bulletin, which primarily contains timely reports about research and educational projects, books and occasional articles about more general topics.

Letter from Rick Doblin, MAPS President

Addressing the theme of kids and psychedelics is part of the educational component of MAPS' overall mission, which is to sponsor scientific research designed to develop psychedelics and marijuana into FDA-approved prescription medicines, and to educate the public honestly about the risks and benefits of these drugs.

This discussion is MAPS' attempt to make a thoughtful, positive and rational contribution to an exceptionally controversial topic. This issue focuses on how families and society can best influence the variety of relationships that young people develop with psychedelic drugs and marijuana. We discuss not only how to minimize risks but also to maximize benefits, despite the fact that our acknowledgement of the potential for benefits is to many an heretical assertion. In order to provide a variety of progressive perspectives, we've included articles from other organizations including the Center for Cognitive Liberty and Ethics, the Center for Educational Research + Development, Children: Our Ultimate Investment, DanceSafe, Drug Policy Alliance, Peyote Way Church, Students for Sensible Drug Policy, and Unitarian Universalists for Drug Policy Reform.

As the proud father of three young children, now ages nine, eight and five, I've seen their ability to understand the world around them grow by leaps and bounds in parallel with their growing curiosity. One of the pleasures of parenthood is struggling to figure out how to explain my perspective on what they are seeing in language that they can understand, without losing important layers of meaning. This is the poetry of parenthood, trying to crystallize complex ideas in simple but not simplistic language. We've been compelled to begin discussions about drugs both as a result of my work (they tease me for being involved with Extrapee and Extrapoop research) and also because since kindergarten on they have seen a DARE flag hanging over the door to the gym at elementary school and the Drug-Free Zone signs plastered outside the school.

Our discussions have focused around broadening the definition of "drugs" to include sugar, coffee, beer and wine, and emphasizing that what matters most is the relationship that people develop with drugs—how they are used—more so than the properties of the drugs themselves. We've also discussed the concepts of good laws and bad laws, of social change and civil disobedience, of mysticism and magic, and of rites of passage.

Among the most destructive and poisonous aspects of the Drug War is that the government seeks to intervene in, and stifle, honest dialogue and sharing between parents and children. Furthermore, the exaggerations in anti-drug curricula have the unintended consequence of undermining the credibility of other necessary health and safety messages that come from government, schools, and parents. What isn't commonly realized is that in the United States, 23 states permit parents to legally administer alcohol to their minor children under parental supervision, despite the prohibition of alcohol use by minors outside of family contexts. Fostering a shift in the locus of decision-making for when any particular child is permitted to experience various drugs—from governmental control and its one-size-fits-all, abstinence-only approach, to the family—is the central concept that this special issue explores. We welcome your feedback on this extremely challenging topic. •

 — Rick Doblin, Ph.D.