

TEEN TOPICS

When Someone You Love Has A Drug Problem

(NAPSA)—It's scary when someone you care about has a drug or alcohol problem—especially if you're the only one who knows. It's even worse when he or she swears you to secrecy. What should you do? Sometimes what matters more is what you *don't* do.

Best-selling author Patricia McCormick tackles this topic from a younger brother's perspective in her newest middle-grade novel, "My Brother's Keeper" (Hyperion Books for Children, \$15.99). With great compassion and wry humor, McCormick explores the anguish of living with divided loyalties and the cost of keeping family secrets.

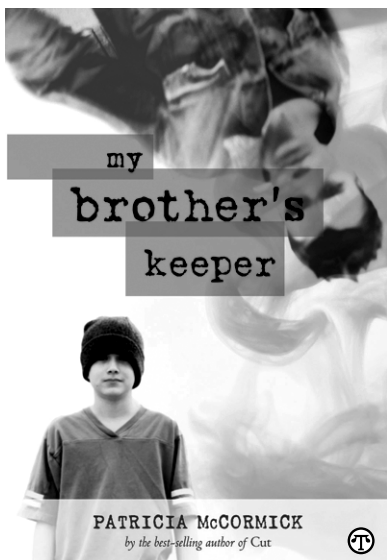
Here are some helpful tips straight from the author for teens who are dealing with drug abuse amongst their family or friends:

Don't stick your head in the sand. Go online and get information about the effects of drug and alcohol abuse. E-mail your sister, brother or friend the links you found. If you're lucky, she'll be prompted to get help on her own and you won't have to be the one to tell anyone.

Don't wait too long. Encourage the person to tell an adult. Set a deadline. If, for instance, your sister talks to an adult in a week, tell her you'll keep it to yourself. If she hasn't done anything at the end of the week, it's your turn.

Don't tell just anyone. Consider all your options. It may be better to start with a neutral person—perhaps a guidance counselor, coach, teacher or pastor.

Don't keep it to yourself. Someone else's out-of-control drinking or drugging is a problem that's too big for you to handle on your own. You'll feel so much anxi-



ety, you're likely to start acting out without even knowing it.

Don't turn your back. When you see the darker side of someone you care about, it can be tempting to run in the other direction. It's okay to say that you're worried, but keep the lines of communication open.

Don't jump to conclusions. It's unlikely, for instance, that your sibling is going to be instantly shipped off to rehab. Chances are, some kind of after-school therapy or support group is all she'll need. Maybe even just a few meetings with the guidance counselor will do the trick, especially if you intervene before the problem gets worse.

Don't assume the worst. It's easy to imagine the adults going ballistic when they find out. Chances are, they'll share your concern and get your friend or sibling the help she needs.

"My Brother's Keeper" is available at bookstores and online at www.amazon.com.