

I say no to drugs.

I stay clean because I am a student—a reader, a thinker, a writer, a learner. From trig to history to philosophy, sharpness of mind and concentration is key; it's a true thinker's worst nightmare to lose the ability to comprehend new concepts or think an idea the entire way through. It is a precious gift to be able to read with a healthy mind, to write from pure imagination, to reason with uncompromised clarity—something far too precious to hand over to the impaired reasoning of marijuana, the disorientation of barbiturates, or the mental confusion of amphetamines.

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I stay clean because I am a dancer—I thrive off of the rush I get each time I spin, reach, collapse, or leap. It's an exhilarating thing to be able to push your body to the limit, to move in ways unbeknownst to you before—to dance is to meet a new definition of grace, strength and soul. But to say yes to drugs would be to trade in beauty for hopelessness, to forget independence and embrace dependency, to exchange freedom for captivity. Never could I limit myself physically through drug use and risk detriment to my ability to dance; to do so, would be suicide of the soul.

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I stay clean because I am a daughter. More specifically, I'm the daughter of a law enforcement officer who has dedicated thirty years of his life to keeping narcotics off the street—a father with a passion for locking up the bad guy and preserving futures in doing so. Consequently, I have an obligation to say no to drugs that extends far beyond the innate responsibility of each child to make their parents proud, or, at the very least, not disappoint them, for I know that saying yes to drugs is saying no to Dad.

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I stay clean because I am an older sister to a sixteen-year-old high school junior with a wide array of paths to choose from. She has watched me grow up, as I have her, and she has always taken careful notice of the pattern of decisions I made on my road to adulthood. And whether or not she'll admit it, I know that I am an example to her. Drugs, just as they pollute the body and mind and heart, would pollute my baby sister's perception of who I am.

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I'm clean because I've chosen to be.

I'm clean because I choose knowledge over ignorance.

I'm clean because I choose clarity over disorientation, direction over aimlessness.

I'm clean because I choose expression over fear, strength over weakness.

I'm clean because I choose love over selfishness and loyalty over betrayal.

I'm clean because I choose to be an example, because I'm *anything* but some sorry statistic.

I say no to drugs because I choose life, and life to the fullest.