

Trust or test? That is the question.

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In recent times I have counselled parents who have reported that they have been doing urinalysis for drugs with their way ward children. Where I live you can now buy such urine testing kits from your local chemist. I believe they cost around 20 to 30 dollars.

This new technology, like all technology will have an impact on us, so I have been musing on what that might be. The last time a parent mentioned this to me I asked them how they went about collecting such a urine sample. They would stand by the toilet door hand the cup to the teenage girl and then take it off her as soon as she came out the door. Somewhat unkindly on my behalf I immediately roared with laughter to which the parent looked rather indignant.



Firstly, the reason why a parent would ask a child to do a urine test is because the parent has lost almost complete trust in the child being truthful to them. They want to know if their child is using drugs and they cannot trust the child to tell them the truth.

Having worked in a prison and drug rehabilitation for a number of years I have some knowledge about doing urinalysis for drugs. There is no point in doing a test for drugs in urine unless you know for certain that:

- 1) The liquid you are testing is in fact urine.
- 2) The urine you are testing is from the person who gives it to you
- 3) The urine you are testing was passed now and not a week or so prior (Human

urine can be stored effectively in refrigeration)

To be certain of such things you have to either watch the person urinate or do a complete strip search of the person before they go into a room by themselves. A small bag of liquid can easily be concealed in between the buttocks or in the vagina. I was recently shown a device that had been made by a person in prison who was subjected to such testing. It was a small balloon connected to a thin tube 6 to 8 inches long. The balloon was to be filled with liquid and held between the buttocks and the tube ran up the underside of the penis. When the person squeezed his buttocks together liquid would come out of the tube at the end of his penis. So now you can understand my spontaneous laughter at the parents' collection method of their daughter's urine sample.

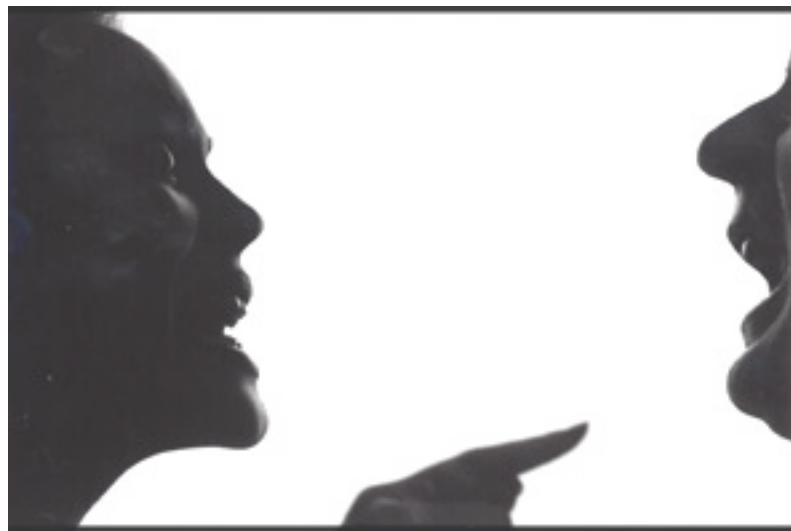


(Some people you just can't trust)

You can in essence forget about the strip search method as I doubt if it is legal for a parent to examine between a girls buttocks and in her vagina . When you watch the child urinate you can't just do one or two glances, you have to closely

watch for a certain period of time. This raises some questions when parents are testing their own children. The parents are requiring the child to expose their genitals to them for somewhat of a close examination. This certainly raises some legal issues about the parents behaviour towards the child.

Another consideration is that 20 dollars is not going to buy you a sophisticated chemical analysis device. So it is possible that there will be false negative results and more importantly false positives. I would suggest to parents that if they are going to do such testing, when there is a positive result and the child keeps denying drug use then they really do need to go and get another 1 (or even 2) such kits and redo the test.



(When it has reached the stage of urine testing children, family relations have usually descended to this).

From what I have seen, when it gets to the point of parents urine testing their child then that is a sign that the relationship between them has reached a significant state of disrepair. It is almost a desperate attempt at some last chance of holding the parent/child relationship together. Clearly there is little trust in the various family relationships involved. The scenarios that I have seen are where the parents are telling the child that if it wants to stay living in the home she must remain drug free. And hence the urine testing. What happens if she gives a positive result? Would you actually eject her from the home? Commonly in such a situation the mother and father start to get into considerable disagreement.

Paruresis

Some times I wonder about my job as a psychologist. It gets me into all sorts of situations.

Some time ago I worked in an organisation that routinely conducted random urine tests for illicit drugs and alcohol. Nothing odd about that, except that at times some of the people being tested would state that they "could not go" (urinate) with someone watching them. Of course a person who is being tested is watched as they urinate in the cup so they don't just pour some other liquid into the cup.

This of course rang alarm bells for the testers because it could just be a ploy by the person to avoid being tested. So these people were sent to me to be assessed. Were they just making up excuses or where they really unable to urinate whilst being watched, was the question being asked.

So there I was, talking with a series of people about how they felt about urinating. I am sure when I took up the honourable profession of psychology I didn't imagine that it would come to this. Well it became a study of mine because I had to learn about this and then I had to assess these individuals who did claim such an inability to urinate. I think I can now say that I am quite conversant with the subject. I find I am an expert on the psychology of urinating!



I discovered that this inability to urinate in public has been called a variety of things - Bashful bladder syndrome, Urophobia, pee-phobia, shy-pee, Shy bladder syndrome and psychogenic urinary retention. However its official name is -

Paruresis. This is a psychological condition that involves the urinary system, such that there is no physical reason why the person cannot pass urine.

It is an anxiety condition, some see it as a type of social phobia as the paruretic is unusually shy and fears being scrutinised or criticised by others when performing in public. In this case urinating. So this is the first indicator one looks for in the true paruretic. Is the person an anxious or uptight type of individual. Do they report anxiety in their life, do they have other phobias?



(Fear and anxiety are often associated with paruresis).

Some of the common symptoms are:

Being anxious or unable to urinate in public

Worry that someone might knock on the toilet door or see, or hear them urinate.

Paruresis usually occurs when using public toilets

It can occur at home when other people are in the house.

The difficulty disappears when the person is confident that no one else is around or likely to arrive.

They see urination in public as a type of performance and a "be Perfect" may be involved in this.

Usually the only truly safe toilet is at home and this is often the only place where the paruretic can consistently urinate freely.

Paruresis is often progressive in nature where the fears of using public toilets grows over time and increasingly limits the persons movements outside the home.

Severe paruetics can spend considerable amounts of time waiting for everyone to leave the toilet before they urinate or they might completely avoid public toilets.

This of course can lead to significant restrictions on the persons movements outside the house.



So in my circumspect questioning I was looking for the person reporting any of these types of symptoms. Also, is the person embarrassed talking about such a difficulty. With the paruretics that I have identified, they have then been allowed to urinate into a cup with no one in the room but in view of a camera. Everyone of them has been able to pass at least enough urine under those conditions for the urinalysis to be effective.

Paruresis can start at any age and affects mainly boys and men although girls and women can also suffer from it. Although the research is limited, surveys suggest that up to 7 percent of the population are paruretic.

There are three main types of treatment;

Psychological treatment primarily focussed at the anxiety, Be Perfect counter-injunction and other obsessive/compulsive symptoms such as catastrophizing and thinking instead of feeling.

Drug treatment especially when there is a significant level of anxiety.

Self catheterisation. Severe paruretics can be taught how to pass a catheter into the urethra to empty the bladder.

With random urine testing probably on the rise in Western cultures the need to be able to identify paruretics will probably grow in importance.

How do I get myself into these situations!!



Would a public toilet like this make it easier for you to go guys?