IHSAAN-DO
Way of Excellence

KNOWLEDGE | CHARACTER | ACTION | CHANGE
PEOPLE FOR A BETTER TOMORROW

STRONGER INDIVIDUALS
STRONGER FAMILIES
A STRONGER UMMAH

IHSAAN-DO
Way of Excellence

ADDICTION & RECOVERY SERIES
EDUCATE | PREVENT | SUPPORT | RESTORE

EPISODE 3

THE GATEWAY OF STIMULATION

VAPING, CIGARETTES & NICOTINE

UNDERSTANDING DEPENDENCE, THE WARNING SIGNS & WHERE IT CAN LEAD



KNOW THE FACTS | RECOGNISE THE SIGNS | UNDERSTAND THE RISKS | PROTECT OUR YOUTH | CHOOSE A HEALTHIER PATH

> *"Real strength is not in what you take, but in what you walk away from."*

ARTICLE BY
KANCHO ABDULLAH BAYETT

COMING NEXT EPISODE 4

FROM EXPERIMENTATION TO ESCALATION
CANNABIS, ALCOHOL & OTHER SUBSTANCES

Understanding the Progression, the Warning Signs & When Experimentation Becomes Dependence

IHSAAN-DO ADDICTION & RECOVERY SERIES

Episode 3: The Gateway of Stimulation

Vaping, Cigarettes & Nicotine — Understanding Dependence, the Warning Signs & Where It Can Lead

Article by Kancho Abdullah Bayett

Introduction — “It's Only Vaping”

Perhaps one of the most dangerous sentences we can hear from a young person today is:

“It's only a vape.”

- It may look harmless.
- It may smell like fruit.
- It may come in attractive colours.
- It may resemble a pen, USB device or small electronic gadget.
- It may be marketed through flavours, social media and images designed to make it look modern and fashionable.

But behind the flavour and the technology, there may be nicotine. And nicotine is highly addictive.

The World Health Organization notes that e-cigarettes can contain nicotine and other potentially harmful substances, and that nicotine exposure during adolescence can affect the developing brain.

So Episode 3 begins with one simple message:

Vaping is not simply a lifestyle choice. For many users, it becomes a nicotine-dependence problem.

SECTION 1

What Is Nicotine?

Nicotine is a highly addictive drug found naturally in tobacco and added to many vaping products. It acts on the brain and can produce feelings of pleasure, stimulation and relief.

The problem is that the brain can learn:

“Nicotine makes me feel better.”

And when nicotine levels fall, the person may experience unpleasant feelings and begin wanting another dose. The cycle becomes:



Eventually, the person may no longer vape because they particularly enjoy it. They vape because they don't feel right without it. That is dependence.

SECTION 2

Why Are Young People Particularly Vulnerable?

The adolescent brain is still developing. The parts responsible for attention, learning, mood and impulse control continue developing into young adulthood. Nicotine exposure during this period can interfere with that development and can establish addiction.

This is why:

“Everyone is doing it” is not a safety argument.

The developing brain is precisely what we need to protect. And this is also why early prevention matters.

SECTION 3

How Does Vaping Begin?

It often doesn't begin with addiction. It may begin with:

- Curiosity — “What's that?”
- Peer pressure — “Try it.”
- Social acceptance — “Everyone vapes.”
- Flavour — “This tastes like mango.”
- Stress — “It helps me calm down.”
- Boredom — “There's nothing else to do.”
- Identity — “This is what people like me do.”

The first use may appear insignificant. But repeated exposure can create dependence.

Research involving more than 25,000 South African high-school learners found substantial vaping prevalence, with reasons for starting including curiosity and social influences, while motivations for continued use included enjoyment, managing distress and nicotine addiction.

That tells us something important:

The reason someone starts may not be the reason they continue.

SECTION 4

The Transformation

At first:

“I vape because my friends do.”

Then:

“I vape because I enjoy it.”

Then:

“I vape when I'm stressed.”

Then:

“I need my vape.”

Eventually:

“I can't stop.”

This is how experimentation can become dependence. The behaviour moves from being chosen to being increasingly driven by craving.

SECTION 5

What Should Parents Look Out For?

Parents and leaders should understand that dependence doesn't always announce itself. Look for changes such as:

- Constantly wanting or searching for the device
- Becoming anxious or irritable without it
- Repeatedly asking for money
- Hiding devices or chargers
- Vaping immediately after waking
- Taking frequent unexplained breaks
- Declining concentration
- Sleep disruption
- Reduced interest in activities
- Becoming defensive when questioned
- Repeatedly promising to stop but returning to vaping
- Needing increasingly frequent use
- Using nicotine to cope with stress or difficult emotions.

One South African school study found that 47% of current adolescent vapers reported vaping within the first hour of waking — a pattern suggesting substantial nicotine dependence.

That is a warning sign we cannot ignore.

SECTION 6

“But Vaping Is Safer Than Smoking, Right?”

This needs a careful answer.

For adults who already smoke cigarettes, completely switching to regulated vaping products may reduce exposure to some toxic chemicals compared with continuing to smoke combustible cigarettes — but that does not make vaping harmless.

For a young person who doesn't smoke:

Starting nicotine vaping is not a healthy alternative.

WHO states that e-cigarettes are not safe and that their emissions can contain nicotine and other toxic substances. We must be particularly careful with young people because nicotine dependence can develop while the brain is still developing.

SECTION 7

Does Vaping Lead to Cigarettes?

We must avoid simplistic claims such as:

“Everyone who vapes will eventually smoke.”

That is not true. But there is a significant association between youth vaping and subsequent cigarette initiation.

WHO reports evidence that e-cigarette use increases conventional cigarette uptake among non-smoking youth, with estimates in the evidence it cites approaching threefold.

So we should not tell young people:

“Vaping automatically leads to cigarettes.”

Rather:

“Vaping can increase your exposure to nicotine and can increase the risk of moving toward conventional tobacco use.”

That is the message we need.

SECTION 8

Why Flavours Matter

Ask a teenager:

Would you rather smoke something that tastes like burnt tobacco, or something marketed as mango, bubblegum or fruit?

The attraction becomes obvious.

WHO has highlighted the use of flavours, colourful designs, social media and youth-oriented marketing as factors that can make nicotine products attractive to young people.

The lesson for parents is simple:

Don't judge the product by its appearance. Something that looks like a toy can still deliver an addictive drug.

SECTION 9

Nicotine and the Addiction Cycle

Remember Episode 2:

TRIGGER → URGE → BEHAVIOUR → REWARD → REPETITION

Now apply it to nicotine:

TRIGGER: stress. **URGE:** "I need a vape." **BEHAVIOUR:** vaping. **REWARD:** temporary relief. Then the nicotine level drops — craving returns — and the person vapes again.

The person may eventually begin vaping not to feel particularly good, but to avoid feeling bad. That is one of the traps of dependence.

SECTION 10

“It Helps Me With Stress”

This statement deserves attention. A person may genuinely feel calmer after nicotine. But that does not necessarily mean nicotine is treating their stress.

If dependence has developed, part of that “relief” may simply be relief from nicotine withdrawal.

So we need to teach young people:

Don't confuse relief with healing.

- Exercise can reduce stress.
- Healthy relationships can reduce stress.
- Sleep can reduce stress.
- Prayer and dhikr can provide spiritual grounding.
- Talking to someone can reduce emotional pressure.
- Professional counselling can help when appropriate.

Nicotine is not the answer to an emotional problem.

SECTION 11

The Islamic Perspective — The Body Is an Amanah

Allah says:

> *“And do not throw yourselves with your own hands into destruction.”*
> **— Qur'an 2:195**

And Allah says:

> *“Indeed, Allah does not like those who commit excess.”*
> **— Qur'an 7:31**

Our bodies are not possessions without accountability. They are amanah.

- Our lungs are an amanah.
- Our brains are an amanah.
- Our hearts are an amanah.
- Our time is an amanah.
- Our wealth is an amanah.
- And our youth is an amanah.

Therefore, Ihsaan-do teaches:

Strength is not simply having the ability to use something. Strength is having the discipline to walk away from something that harms you.

SECTION 12

What Can Parents Do?

If you discover that your child is vaping:

DON'T START WITH:

“You're a disgrace!”

START WITH:

“Talk to me. I want to understand what happened.”

Then establish boundaries. Ask:

- When did you start?
- How often are you using it?
- Does it contain nicotine?
- Where are you getting it?
- Who introduced you to it?
- What situations make you want it?
- Have you tried stopping?
- What happens when you don't have it?

Then work together on a plan. If dependence is established, don't assume punishment alone will solve it. The young person may need behavioural support and, depending on age and circumstances, professional medical guidance.

SECTION 13

How Do We Prevent Young People From Starting?

Prevention begins before the first puff.

Educate early.

Teach children what nicotine is.

Create a culture.

Make tobacco and nicotine use socially unacceptable within the household.

Know their environment.

Know their friends. Know their routines. Know where they spend time.

Talk without lecturing.

Give them space to ask uncomfortable questions.

Develop purpose.

- Sport
- Martial arts
- Education
- Leadership
- Service
- Family
- Faith
- Creative pursuits.

Build resilience.

Teach young people how to handle stress without substances, rejection without self-destruction, boredom without constant stimulation, and peer pressure without surrendering their values.

SECTION 14

If Someone Already Wants to Quit

Don't shame them. Help them.

The first step is recognising:

“I don't want nicotine controlling me anymore.”

Then:

- Identify triggers.
- Remove access where possible.
- Change routines.
- Avoid situations where vaping is encouraged.
- Tell someone trustworthy.
- Prepare alternatives for cravings.
- Exercise.
- Stay occupied.
- Build accountability.
- And if dependence is significant, seek appropriate healthcare support.

Quitting can involve withdrawal symptoms and strong cravings. A person who struggles to stop is not necessarily weak — the nicotine has created a dependence that may require structured support.

WHO's guidance emphasises tobacco cessation support as an important part of reducing tobacco-related harm.

SECTION 15

Don't Wait for the Worst

One of the greatest mistakes communities make is waiting until someone is deeply addicted before intervening.

- Prevention is easier than recovery.
- Early intervention is easier than crisis intervention.
- Conversation is easier than confrontation after years of secrecy.

Therefore:

- See the warning sign.
- Start the conversation.
- Offer support.
- Set boundaries.
- Act early.

The Ihsaan-do Principle

Don't wait for addiction to become a crisis.



And never forget:

The young person is more important than the habit.

We are not fighting against young people. We are fighting for them.

- Their health.
- Their future.
- Their dignity.
- Their families.
- Their potential.
- Their iman.
- Their purpose.
- Their lives.

A Message to the Young Person

If you vape or smoke: you are not beyond help.

If you have tried to quit and failed: try again.

If your friends pressure you: you are allowed to say no.

If nicotine has begun controlling you: ask for help.

Real strength is not needing to prove yourself by doing what everyone else is doing. Real strength is being able to say: “I choose what controls my life.”

Coming Next — Episode 4

From Experimentation to Escalation — Cannabis, Alcohol & Other Substances: Understanding the Progression, the Warning Signs, Peer Pressure & When Experimentation Becomes Dependence.

In Episode 4, we move beyond nicotine and examine the next stage of the addiction landscape — why people experiment with substances, what makes some people progress toward dependence, what parents should look for, and how early intervention can change the trajectory.

The journey continues… From stimulation → to dependence → to escalation → and ultimately toward recovery.

IHSAAN-DO

Knowledge • Character • Action • Change

Article by Kancho Abdullah Bayett

Stronger Individuals | Stronger Families | A Stronger Ummah