



A Mother's Story

Why the Courage to Speak® Presentation exists



I am not sharing this story as a professional speaker. I am sharing it as a mother. I believed I knew my son. I believed I would recognize a serious problem if one existed. What I did not understand then is how easily silence, denial, and good intentions can coexist inside a loving family.

On September 10, 1996, I woke to every mother's nightmare. I found my 20-year-old son, Ian, dead in his bed from an accidental heroin and Valium overdose. Ian was bright, athletic, popular, and deeply loved. He had dreams, friends, and a future. Drugs quietly dismantled his life while we believed we had everything under control.

Like many young people, Ian minimized his substance use. Like many parents, I mistook warning signs for normal adolescent behavior. He became skilled at hiding what was really happening. Even as he succeeded in school and sports, the truth was slipping further out of reach. By the time we understood the depth of his struggle, time was no longer on our side.

After Ian's death, I realized that secrecy and silence were our greatest enemies. This is why I speak. I share our story so parents, educators, and young people understand how quickly things can escalate when difficult conversations are avoided. The Courage to Speak® Presentation exists to help families talk sooner, listen more closely, and recognize that prevention begins with communication.

This was my promise to Ian.