

Parent Tip Sheet

Kids & Drugs: Know the Warning Signs

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For most parents, the thought that their child could be harmfully using alcohol or other drugs leads to shock, fear, confusion, and questions. Sometimes when parents fear that drugs might be in the picture, it turns them into police instead of parents. Rather than talking about the situation, arguments, struggle and defensiveness can occur. If parents and teens can keep talking to one another, it is more likely that teens will turn to their parents for help when they are having problems with things like relationship issues, school stress or drugs.

There is no single cause or reason why young people abuse drugs.

Alcohol and other drug use is regarded as a common and acceptable part of everyday life even though it is dangerous for many people. Adolescence is also a time when teens are curious and willing to take risks, even risks related to alcohol and drug use. Different factors may put a person at risk of using alcohol or other drugs, such as stress, learning disabilities, physical, mental or sexual abuse, depression, or low self-esteem. These factors do not "cause" teens to use alcohol and other drugs though, and many young people are able to deal with tough situations without using substances. However, the chance that teens may turn to alcohol or other drugs is increased if they are having some of the problems stated above.

Physical, emotional and social changes can indicate a problem with alcohol or other drugs. However, these changes could be due to other reasons, so it is important to take a look at all possibilities before pin-pointing alcohol or other drug abuse as the problem.

Some changes that could indicate a possible alcohol or other drug problem are:

- Blood-shot eyes, dilated pupils, wearing sunglasses indoors;
- Frequent use of eye-drops;
- Runny nose, irritated nose;
- Appetite loss/weight loss or weight gain, frequent "munchies";
- Frequent headaches, morning vomiting and tiredness;
- Excessive sleeping or difficulty sleeping, decrease in energy;
- Slurred, slow speech or hyperactivity;
- Difficulty concentrating or thinking clearly;
- A drop in school attendance and performance;
- Wide mood swings, depression, anxiety, paranoia;
- A change in friends to those who are known users;
- Old friends expressing concern regarding use;

- A constant need for money or having a lot of money for no reason.

Use of defenses can be a warning sign to parents that substance abuse is a possibility. Common defenses are:

- **Denial** – saying there is no problem. “Who me? I don’t have a problem.”
- **Minimizing** – downplaying the seriousness of use, how much or how often. “I only use on weekends.” Or “I just use socially.”
- **Blaming** – placing responsibility with others. “It’s not my fault. It’s your (*parent’s*) fault, their (*friend’s*), society’s fault.”
- **Excuses/rationalizing** – “yes – but” defense, admits there is a problem, but only because of certain conditions. Believes the drug use will go away when the pressure goes away.
- **Diversion** – teens shift the focus away from themselves to problems with siblings, teachers, school, or problems in society. This helps to cover the problems with substance abuse.
- **Anger** – use of anger, alone or combined with other defenses, helps to intimidate people so that they will not talk about or bring up the issue of substance abuse.

If you have any questions about the information above, or if you would like to see a counselor to talk about your concerns, AADAC is here to help.