

SIGNS & SYMPTOMS OF TEEN DRINKING AND DRUG USE

How can you tell if your child is using drugs or alcohol? It is difficult because changes in mood or attitudes, unusual temper outbursts, changes in sleeping habits and changes in hobbies or other interests are common in teens. What should you look for?

Watch List for Parents



- Changes in friends
- Negative changes in schoolwork, missing school or declining grades
- Increased secrecy about possessions or activities
- Use of incense, room deodorant or perfume to hide smoke or chemical odors
- Subtle changes in conversations with friends, e.g. more secretive, using “coded” language
- Change in clothing choices: new fascination with clothes that highlight drug use
- Increase in borrowing money
- Evidence of drug paraphernalia such as pipes, rolling papers, etc.
- Evidence of use of inhalant products (such as hairspray, nail polish, correction fluid, common household products); Rags and paper bags are sometimes used as accessories
- Bottles of eye drops, which may be used to mask bloodshot eyes or dilated pupils
- New use of mouthwash or breath mints to cover up the smell of alcohol
- Missing prescription drugs—especially narcotics and mood stabilizers



LAYING DOWN THE RULES

Parents, you are the first line of defense when it comes to your child’s drug use or drinking. **And you do make a difference!** Nearly two-thirds of teenagers see great risk of upsetting their parents or losing the respect of family and friends if they smoke marijuana or use other drugs.

There are some simple steps you can take to keep track of your child’s activities. Of course, your kids might not like you keeping tabs on where they are and what they are doing. It won’t be a democracy, and it shouldn’t be, according to many parenting experts. **In the end, it’s not pestering, it’s parenting.**

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- 1. Set rules.** Let your teen know that drug and alcohol use is unacceptable and that these rules are set to keep him or her safe. Set limits with clear consequences for breaking them.
- 2. Praise and reward** good behavior for compliance and enforce consequences for non-compliance.
- 3. Know where your teen is** and what he or she will be doing during unsupervised time. Research shows that teens with unsupervised time are *three times more likely* to use marijuana or other drugs. Unsupervised teens are also *more likely* to engage in risky behaviors such as **underage drinking, sexual activity, and cigarette smoking** than other teens. This is particularly important after school, in the evening hours and also when school is out during the summer or holidays.
- 4. Talk to your teen.** While shopping or riding in the car, casually ask him how things are going at school, about his friends, what his plans are for the weekend, etc.
- 5. Keep them busy — especially between 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.** and into the evening hours. Engage your teen in after-school activities. Enroll your child in a supervised educational program or a sports league. Research shows that teens who are involved in constructive, adult-supervised activities are *less likely to use drugs* than other teens.
- 6. Check on your teenager.** Occasionally check in to see that your kids are where they say they are going to be and that they are spending time with whom they say they are with.
- 7. Establish a "core values statement" for your family.** Consider developing a family mission statement that reflects your family's core values. Talking about what they stand for is particularly important at a time when **teens are pressured DAILY by external influencers** on issues like drugs, sex, violence or vandalism. If there is no compass to guide your kids, the void will be filled by the strongest force.
- 8. Spend time together** as a family regularly and **be involved** in your child's life. Create a bond with your child. This builds up credit with your child so that when you have to set limits or enforce consequences, it's less stressful.
- 9. Take time to learn the facts about marijuana and underage drinking** and **talk to your teen** about its harmful health, social, learning and mental effects on young users.
- 10. Get to know your teen's friends** (and their parents) by inviting them over for dinner or talking with them at your teen's soccer practice, dance rehearsal or other activities.
- 11. Stay in touch with the adult supervisors** of your child (camp counselors, coaches, employers, teachers) and have them inform you of any changes in your teen. Warning signs of drug use include distance from family and existing friends, hanging out with a new circle of friends, lack of interest in personal appearance or changes in eating or sleeping habits.



LRADAC
The Behavioral Health Center of the Midlands

For more information, or to make a referral, contact LRADAC, The Behavioral Health Center of the Midlands at (803) 733-1390.