

Youth, Alcohol, and Other Drugs

Imagine for a moment how much more productive, full and satisfying life may be for a teenager who leaves drug and alcohol use behind.

Perhaps most concerning is the **RISK OF DAMAGE** to the teen's developing brain, including lasting impairment in memory.

Experimenting with drugs and alcohol is common for adolescents. It's true that some youth are able to try drugs or alcohol once and stop. Others might use occasionally without severe consequences; however, that's not the case for many teens that continually use substances or move on to more serious drugs.

RISK FACTORS

It's impossible to predict which teens will develop addictions or other serious problems. There are, however, a few known risk factors. These include:

- Those with depression, anxiety, or another mental illness
- Those with low self-esteem
- Those with a family history of substance abuse

TYPES OF ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE

Teenagers abuse legal and illegal drugs. Legally available substances include alcohol, prescription and over-the-counter medications, and inhalants. Examples of illegal substances are marijuana, cocaine, LSD, PCP, heroin, and ecstasy.

CONSEQUENCES OF TEENS USING

The negative and possibly long-term effects of teenage drug use are severe. In addition to academic problems or failure, teens are at high risk for accidents, assault, unplanned and unsafe sex, depression, and even suicide. Perhaps most concerning is the risk to the teen's growing and developing brain. Alcohol use can damage long-term memory significantly when blackouts occur.

WARNING SIGNS OF TEEN DRUG OR ALCOHOL USE

Look for the following symptoms to signal a possible recreational or serious drug use problem. Remember, some signs could indicate other physical causes, so it's important to meet with a physician for a proper diagnosis.

- Red eyes
- Sudden changes in mood or personality
- Irritability or depression
- Withdrawal from family or friends
- Drop in grades

TALKING WITH YOUR TEEN

Open and direct communication produces the best results.

- Ask their opinion and use questions that invite more than a one word answer.
- Start the conversation early; middle school students are already talking about this.
- Educate and avoid lecturing; provide information and ask for feedback and views.

ACTION STEPS

When it comes to teenage drinking or drug use, anyone is susceptible. The best course of action is involvement.

- ✓ Know your teen's friends and their activities.
- ✓ Keep track of prescription and over-the-counter drugs.
- ✓ Be consistent and clear with expectations and consequences.
- ✓ Set a good example with your own life.
- ✓ Praise positive actions.

KEEP IN MIND

You're not alone when it comes to raising a responsible, mature teenager. Consider reaching out to your health care provider and engaging other counseling resources for guidance on next steps.

What steps will you take today to dramatically and positively change the course of a young person's life?