

Harm Reduction Starts with Prevention

Determining if your child is experimenting with substances can be quite challenging. The signs of drug use in teenagers often resemble typical behavior seen in young adults, sometimes overlapping with symptoms of mental health issues like depression or anxiety.

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In 2022, 48.7 million people aged 12 or older had a substance use disorder in the past year, including 29.5 million who had an alcohol use disorder, 27.2 million who had a drug use disorder, and 8.0 million people who had both an alcohol use disorder and drug use disorder.

Prevention & Prompt Engagement:

Adolescent and young adult stages are characterized by a whirlwind of confusion, complexity, and crucial development. Grasping the social and developmental dynamics in teens, particularly how they intertwine with substance use, is pivotal in laying the groundwork for positive outcomes.

Ways to spot signs of drug/alcohol use:



Smell

You can engage in authentic, direct communication when your child returns from socializing with friends. If they've consumed alcohol or smoked, the aroma may linger on their breath, attire, and hair.



Eye Contact

Observe their eyes closely; they may appear red and droopy, with narrowed pupils indicating marijuana use. Dilated pupils and trouble focusing may suggest alcohol consumption. Additionally, a flushed, reddened complexion can also signal drinking.



Pay Attention to Behavior

Monitor how they act after returning from activities with friends. Do you notice them acting differently than before they left? Are they unusually loud, hyper, clumsy or withdrawn, tired and standoffish? Do they seem sick and spend time in the bathroom? These behaviors may suggest the possibility of alcohol consumption, marijuana use, or involvement with other illicit substances.



Explore their space

If there's reason to be concerned, you may choose to investigate further than the boundaries of the main living areas. Be ready to justify your decision to search their personal space, whether or not you inform them ahead of time. Emphasize your concern for their well-being. Common places include inside drawers (beneath or between items), in small cases, under the furniture, inside other medicine containers or snack bags,

Key Indicator Signs:

Shifts in mood/personality

- Sullen, withdrawn or depressed
- Less motivated
- Silent, uncommunicative
- Hostile, angry, uncooperative
- Deceitful or secretive
- Unable to focus
- Loss of inhibitions
- Hyperactivity or unusually animated

Behavioral changes

- Changed relationships w/family or friends
- Absenteeism or loss of interest in school, work or other activities
- Avoids eye contact
- Locks doors
- Disappears for long periods
- Goes out often, frequently breaking curfew
- Secretive with the use of phone
- Makes endless excuses
- Cash problems
- Has become clumsy
- Periods of sleeplessness or high energy, followed by long periods of "catch up" sleep

Hygiene & appearance

- Smell of smoke or other unusual smells on breath or clothes
- Messier than usual appearance
- Poor hygiene
- Frequently red or flushed cheeks or face
- Burns or soot on fingers or lips
- Track marks on arms or legs

Physical health

- Frequent sickness
- Unusually tired
- Unable to speak intelligibly, slurred speech
- Nosebleeds, running nose
- Sores, spots around mouth
- Sudden weight loss or gain
- Skin abrasions/bruises
- Frequent perspiration
- Seizures and/or vomiting