



Alcohol and Drug Abuse

The use and abuse of alcohol and drugs changes over time. In a 2000 study completed by the University of Michigan they found that 54% of High School Seniors reported using an illicit drug. 29% reported using an illicit drug other than Marijuana, making Marijuana the most common drug used by High School Seniors other than alcohol. Ecstasy now is more commonly used than Cocaine; 10% report having used it.

Alcohol use continues to be the most prevalent and serious drug in all ages. In the same survey, the University of Michigan found that 33% of high school seniors reported being drunk within the last 30 days. They also found that 9% of adolescent females and 20% of adolescent males met the criteria for adult alcohol disorders. 2 in 5 high school senior males report 5 or more drinks on a biweekly basis. 75% of adolescent deaths are related to alcohol use.

Who is at Risk?

Though any adolescent might be a risk, there is greater risk for adolescents with ADD, Depression, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Conduct Disorder and Learning Disabilities. A family history of addiction is a high risk characteristic, both from genetic factors and family role models. Other high risk signs include inconsistent parental discipline, peer group usage, alienation, poor academic achievement, and low self-esteem. Children and Adolescents that have experienced physical or sexual abuse are at a greater risk.

Signs of Alcohol and Drug Abuse

- Deterioration in school performance
- Defensiveness to questions about alcohol and drug use
- Deterioration in family relations
- Personality changes, moodiness, lying, loss of interest in activities
- Alienation from school, friends and family

Defining Terms

- **Binge Drinking:** Drinking high quantities of alcohol in a short period of time. Binge drinking is responsible for most of the alcohol related deaths in colleges.
- **Black Outs:** This happens when someone has no memory of their actions after drug or alcohol usage. This is highly suggestive of Substance Abuse or Dependency.
- **Substance Use:** The use of any illegal drug or alcohol.

- **Substance Abuse:** Recurrent use that has resulted in failure to meet obligations at work, school or home. Recurrent use that has resulted in legal action, physical hazardous activity like driving while impaired or interpersonal relationship difficulties.
- **Substance Dependency:** Recurrent use that results in tolerance and greater need for substance, withdrawal symptoms, greater quantity of use and considerable amount of time utilized in obtaining the substance.

Stages of Substance Use

1. **Potential:** Need for immediate gratification and peer acceptance. Availability of substance.
2. **Experimentation:** Use of tobacco, alcohol and marijuana. Learning the euphoria.
3. **Regular Use:** Seeking the euphoria. Some consequences for use. Changes in behavior.
4. **Regular Use:** Preoccupation with the “high.” Daily use. Loss of control.
5. **Burnout:** Daily use to feel normal.

Prevention

- Parents should be good role models in their use of alcohol. You should never make light of its use.
- Parents who use heavily or make light of someone else being drunk will validate for their children and adolescents that it is okay to use heavily.
- Know your children and adolescent’s friends. Know where your child or adolescent is and what they are doing.
- Enforce house rules for curfew and late night outings.
- Avoid early TV watching of adult shows that make light of drug and alcohol use.

Can Your Child or Adolescent Have Drug Testing in the Office?

This is a difficult issue because children and adolescents, by law, have the right for their privacy when dealing with substance use and abuse. Therefore a drug screen cannot be ordered without their permission. Many times it is better for parents to obtain the over the counter home drug screens. They are cheaper, do not involve your insurance company and avoid the legal ramifications that drug screening causes in the office.

What to do if You Suspect Your Child is Using

If you suspect that your child is using alcohol or drugs, then face the problem. **TALK** to your child. If you cannot have a conversation freely with your adolescent about these issues, then you should suspect that the problem is greater than you feared. If you are able to have a good free conversation, then set up house rules and expectations about alcohol and drug use. Knowing what your adolescent is doing and with whom they are doing it with, will be your best sign that your adolescent is not in trouble.

If however, you cannot have that conversation and the adolescent is defensive and will not talk with you, then you should take the next step. If you know your adolescent is using regularly then it also time to take the next step. The “next step” is an evaluation for Abuse and Dependency. Many facilities offer drug and alcohol screening. These programs usually offer a free intake evaluation. The evaluation says a lot to your teenager, even if a problem is not determined to be the case. It says that you care enough to find out the extent of their use and abuse. Often professional drug and alcohol education can be



provided to your teenager under these circumstances. If the evaluation determines that a problem exists, then a referral would be made for treatment. For local facilities that would perform an initial evaluation, ask us or your pediatrician.

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