

Concerned Your Teen May Be Using Drugs?

Tips For Parents

A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness

When you have a suspicion that your teen is "experimenting" with drugs, what do you do?



Get Educated

First, learn as much as you can.

Have The Talk — Let Them Know You Know

The next thing you can do is sit down and talk with your child. Be sure to have the conversation when you are calm and have plenty of time. This isn't an easy task—your feelings may range from anger to guilt that you have "failed" because your kid is using drugs. This isn't true—by staying involved you can help him stop using and make choices that will make a positive difference in his life.

Be Specific About Your Concerns

Tell your child what you see and how you feel about it. Be specific about the things you have observed that cause concern. Make it known if you found drug paraphernalia (or empty bottles or cans). Explain exactly how her behavior or appearance (bloodshot eyes, different clothing) has changed and why that worries you. Tell her that drug and alcohol use is dangerous and it's your job to keep her away from things that put her in danger.

Don't Make Excuses

Although it's natural for a parent to make excuses for a child, you're not helping him if you make excuses when he misses school or family functions when you suspect something else is at play. Take the next step: Talk to your child and get more information.

Try to Remain Calm and Connect with Him/Her

Have this discussion without getting mad or accusing your child of being stupid or bad, or an embarrassment to the family. Be firm but loving with your tone and try not to get hooked into an argument. Knowing that kids are naturally private about their lives, try to find out what's going on in your child's life. Try not to make the discussion an inquisition; simply try to connect with your teen and find out why she may be making bad choices. Find out if friends or others offered your child drugs at a party or school. Did she try it just out of curiosity, or did she use marijuana or alcohol for some other reason? That alone will be a signal to your child that you care and that you are going to be the parent exercising your rights.

Here are some suggested things to tell your son or daughter:

- You LOVE him, and you are worried that he might be using drugs or alcohol;
- You KNOW that drugs may seem like the thing to do, but doing drugs can have serious consequences;
- It makes you FEEL worried and concerned about her when she does drugs;

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- You are there to LISTEN to him;
- You WANT her to be a part of the solution;
- You tell him what you WILL do to help him.
- Know that you will have this discussion many, many times. Talking to your kid about drugs and alcohol is not a one-time event.

Be Prepared. Practice What You'll Say

Be prepared for your teen to deny using drugs. Don't expect her to admit she has a problem. Your child will probably get angry and may try to change the subject. Maybe you'll be confronted with questions about what you did as a kid. If you are asked, it is best to be honest, and if you can, connect your use to negative consequences. Answering deceptively can cause you to lose credibility with your kids if they ever find out that you've lied to them. On the other hand, if you don't feel comfortable answering the question, you can talk about some specific people you know who had negative things happen to them as a result of drug and alcohol use. However, if the time comes to talk about it, you can give short, honest answers like these:

"When I was a kid I took drugs because some of my friends did. I wanted to fit in. If I'd known then about the consequences and how they would affect my life, I never would have tried drugs. I will do everything I can to help keep you away from them."

"I drank alcohol and smoked marijuana because I was bored and wanted to take some risks, but I soon found out that I couldn't control the risks — the loss of trust of my parents and friends. There are much better ways of challenging yourself than doing drugs."

Act Now

You can begin to more closely monitor your child's activities.

Have a few conversations.

Ask: Who? What? Where? When?

Reflect with your child on why he is using drugs and try to understand the reasons so that you can help solve the problem. When you get a better idea of the situation, then you can decide the next steps.

These could include setting new rules and consequences that are reasonable and enforceable — such as:

- a new curfew,
- no cell phone or computer privileges for a period of time, or
- less time hanging out with friends.

You may want to get them involved in pro-social activities that will keep them busy and help them meet new people.

Information Provided by:
 Parents: The Anti-Drug
www.theantidrug.com