

Stay Tuned to Hidden Signs of Substance Abuse in Teens



Some parents feel like they have to sleep with both eyes open when their children are growing up. Adolescence is a natural period of experimentation. Coupled with the profound physical and emotional changes kids undergo at this time, using drugs (including alcohol) is a potential problem—and a serious one.

Aside from the obvious clues—like the smell of marijuana drifting from your son or daughter's bedroom—other, more subtle signs of substance abuse include:

- Borrowing money frequently, or stealing.
- A short fuse; becoming easily irritated or frustrated.
- Sleeping or eating more or less than usual.
- Sudden, noticeable weight loss.
- Unusual moodiness or withdrawal.
- Lack of interest in appearance, or poor personal hygiene habits.
- Secretiveness about new friends or personal belongings.
- Decline in academic performance.

If you notice any of these symptoms, don't preach, lecture, or lash out. Instead, discuss the substance use calmly and frankly. Let your children know you're concerned, and let them know why: Their use of alcohol and other drugs is not only illegal, it's also not too smart. Be firm – tell your children what you intend to do if they continue to abuse alcohol or other drugs, and follow through.

Why Smoking Marijuana Is a Mistake

Marijuana is the most commonly used illicit drug around. It's a mild hallucinogen that may also produce euphoria, apathy, poor coordination, reddened eyes, increased appetite, increased heart rate, panic attacks, and short-term memory loss.

Doesn't sound like too much fun. So why do kids smoke pot? For the same reason they drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes: It's wrong, it's risky, and their friends coax them into it. The only way to persuade your kids not to try pot is to give them the facts. Tell them that:

- Driving when you're high on pot is as dangerous as driving when you've been drinking.
- Smoking one joint is the equivalent of smoking 16 cigarettes in terms of reduced vital capacity.
- In males, marijuana decreases sperm count and lowers blood levels of testosterone (the primary male hormone)—in effect, reducing virility.
- In females, marijuana may increase the risk of miscarriage.
- In everyone, marijuana slows learning, impairs memory, and muddles your thinking and understanding, making you tired and fuzzy brained.