

Signs and Symptoms of Teen Drug Use and Drinking

Recognizing teen drug use and drinking can be difficult. Teenage years are often plagued with mood swings and attitude changes. But sometimes, these changes are signs of other issues going on in their lives – like drug use or underage drinking. These changes can mean a big difference between a teen going through growing pains or a teen living a dangerous life. And as a parent, it's important for you to know the warning signs.

What should you look for? Some signs appear in the form of depression, withdrawal, carelessness with grooming or hostility. Consider every area of your teen's life to determine whether changes are out of the ordinary.

Consider this watch list:

- Changes in friends
- Declining grades, negative changes in schoolwork, or missing school
- Increased secrecy about possessions or activities
- Use of incense, room deodorant, or perfume to hide smoke or chemical odors
- Subtle changes in conversations with friends, e.g. more secretive, using “coded” language
- Change in clothing choices: new fascination with clothes that highlight drug use
- Increase in borrowing money
- Evidence of drug paraphernalia such as pipes, rolling papers, etc.
- Evidence of use of inhalant products (such as hairspray, nail polish, correction fluid, common household products); Rags and paper bags are sometimes used as accessories
- Bottles of eye drops, which may be used to mask bloodshot eyes or dilated pupils
- New use of mouthwash or breath mints to cover up the smell of alcohol
- Missing prescription drugs—especially narcotics and mood stabilizers

These changes often signal that something harmful is going on—and often that involves alcohol or drugs. You may want to take your child to the doctor and ask him or her about screening your child for drugs and alcohol. This may involve the health professional asking your child a simple question, or it may involve a urine or blood drug screen. Be on the watch for these signs so that you can spot trouble before it goes too far.

This article is brought to you by the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign. For more information on how to keep your teen drug-free, visit www.TheAntiDrug.com. You can help educate your teen on the dangers of drug use by encouraging them to visit www.Freevibe.com, a Web-site dedicated to educating teens on making drug-free choices. Additional materials, including brochures, posters, and postcards, are available free of charge through the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information at 1-800-788-2800.