

REMARKS FOR ONDCP EARLY INTERVENTION INITIATIVE PRESS CONFERENCE
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It's a pleasure for the American Academy of Pediatrics to be involved in this initiative. As physicians specifically trained to treat children and teenagers, we know that substance use and abuse has increased over the last 30 years. Substances such as alcohol and tobacco, as well as marijuana, cocaine, hallucinogens and inhalants, are abused by teenagers and a growing number of pre-teens.

Adult diseases begin in childhood. Drug addiction is no exception. Research shows that the earlier a child uses marijuana or alcohol, the more likely they are to become dependent on drugs or alcohol later in life. And though use does not always end in addiction, addiction always begins with a decision to use.

It's important to know that in some cases, there is a genetic risk for addiction, just like heart disease, diabetes and cancer. Addiction is a disease of the brain. Like other serious diseases, early detection and action can save a life.

Parents should learn the signs and symptoms of drug and alcohol abuse among their children. Just as parents wouldn't ignore the early signs of diabetes, they can't afford to ignore early substance use. Even limited use can expose youth to a variety of negative consequences. And there is no way to predict in advance with certainty which children will or won't become dependent. Whether they do or do not depends for the most part on their personality, their family, and their community. Parents, peers and professionals must try to stop teen drug use before treatment may be needed. This initiative is a much-needed resource to help in that process.

Pediatricians understand that good communication between parents and children is one of the best ways to prevent or stop drug use. If talking to your child becomes a problem, your doctor may provide the key to opening lines of communication. If you suspect your child is using drugs or alcohol, please ask your pediatrician for advice and help. We need to take action early to stave off any serious problem that could endanger your child's health and quite possibly their life.