

# Resources

National Clearinghouse  
for Alcohol and Drug Information  
(NCADI)  
Phone: 1-800-788-2800  
Web: [www.health.org](http://www.health.org)

National Institute on  
Drug Abuse (NIDA)  
Web: [www.nida.nih.gov](http://www.nida.nih.gov)

National Institute on  
Alcohol Abuse and  
Alcoholism (NIAAA)  
Web: [www.niaaa.nih.gov](http://www.niaaa.nih.gov)

Substance Abuse and  
Mental Health Services  
Administration  
(SAMHSA)  
Web: [www.family.samhsa.gov](http://www.family.samhsa.gov)

## Especially for Teens

[www.freevibe.com](http://www.freevibe.com) is an online service of the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign that offers information, fact sheets, games and posters for teens with a special section on early intervention.

[www.checkyourself.org](http://www.checkyourself.org) is an online service of the Partnership for a Drug-Free America ([www.drugfreeamerica.org](http://www.drugfreeamerica.org)) that offers resources, information, quizzes and videos for teens to question themselves about their drug use.

[www.thecoolspot.org](http://www.thecoolspot.org) is an online service of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. It is a place for teens about "being yourself, thinking for yourself, and getting the facts about underage drinking."

## Especially for Parents

[www.TheAntiDrug.com](http://www.TheAntiDrug.com) is an online service of the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign that offers resources, information and facts for parents.

[www.laantidroga.com](http://www.laantidroga.com) is the Spanish online service of the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign and offers resources, information and facts for parents.

[www.family.samhsa.gov](http://www.family.samhsa.gov) is an online service of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration developed to support the efforts of parents and other caring adults to promote mental health and prevent the use of alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs among 7- to 18-year-olds.

If you know anyone who is in need of alcohol or drug treatment, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has a treatment locator that can be found at <http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/facilitylocator.doc.htm> or you may call the SAMHSA Referral Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP.

[www.drugfreeamerica.org/Parents\\_Caregivers](http://www.drugfreeamerica.org/Parents_Caregivers) is an online service of the Partnership for a Drug-Free America that offers tips and information for parents and caregivers.

## Community Resources

Drug-Free Community Coalitions provide prevention information and intervention services in many communities throughout the United States. Go to [www.helpyourcommunity.org](http://www.helpyourcommunity.org). Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA) is the national membership organization representing community anti-drug coalitions nationwide. CADCA helps coalitions become stronger and more effective, and works with federal, state and local government to support the coalition movement. Go to [www.cadca.org](http://www.cadca.org). The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) offers a Web site to help identify drugs of abuse: [www.dea.gov/concern/concern/htm](http://www.dea.gov/concern/concern/htm).



# Suspect Your Teen Is Using Drugs or Drinking?

A BRIEF GUIDE TO ACTION FOR PARENTS

**PARENTS.**  
THE ANTI-DRUG.

# A Message From Our Partners:

Despite all of your efforts to keep your kids drug-free, one day you might suspect that your son or daughter is using drugs or alcohol. Perhaps you have found an odd-looking pipe in his room, cans and bottles in the car or rolling papers in her laundry. Or you overheard a conversation not meant for you. Whatever the signal, your gut instinct has been activated. How do you know if you need to do anything? What do you do now? Where do you turn for help?

Every day, approximately 4,700 American youth under age 18 try marijuana for the first time. That is about equal to the enrollment of six average-sized U.S. high schools. In 2003, nearly nine out of 10 twelfth graders reported marijuana as being accessible. By the time they finish the eighth grade, approximately 50 percent of adolescents have had at least one drink, and more than 20 percent report having been “drunk.” Drug and alcohol use by teens increases the risk of addiction and can change the developing brain for life.

Despite these statistics, one thing remains true: Parents are the most important influence in a teen’s decisions about drug use. You can and do make a difference. If you suspect or know that your child is using drugs, take action now, because the longer you wait, the harder it will be to deal with your child’s drug use.

Sincerely,



Despite all of your efforts to keep  
your kids drug-free, one day,  
you might suspect that your son or  
daughter is using drugs or alcohol.

American Academy  
of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

**National  
PTA**

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## What's the Big Deal?

Most adults acknowledge that drug experimentation by teens is risky and can lead to serious trouble. But some say “it’s only marijuana,” or “it’s only alcohol,” or “it’s a rite of passage.” Not any more. The world has changed, and so have the drugs. In fact, the marijuana of today is stronger than ever before. And kids are using drugs and alcohol at a much younger age, when their bodies and brains are still developing and more vulnerable to their effects. Drug and alcohol use can lead to many negative consequences, including bad grades, broken friendships, family problems, physical injuries and trouble with the law.

Substance use (including alcohol, which is illegal in all 50 states for people under the age of 21) can change the direction of a young person’s life — physically, emotionally and behaviorally. It can weaken the ability to concentrate and retain information during a teen’s peak learning years, and it can impair judgment, leading to risky decision-making that could involve sex or riding in a car with someone under the influence of drugs.

“Experimentation,” even with marijuana, can also lead to addiction. Not everyone progresses from use to abuse to addiction, but it is a dangerous road, and there is no way to know who will develop a problem and who won’t. Research shows that kids start using drugs and alcohol because they feel the need to take risks or they believe it will help them fit in or feel better. Sometimes they use drugs because they are seeking relief from stress or feelings of depression. And it’s important to remember that there is, sometimes, a genetic risk for addiction — just like heart disease, diabetes, cancer and other diseases.

## The Science Is Clear

Drug and alcohol use by teens is not something to be taken lightly. More teens are in treatment for marijuana dependence than for all other illicit drugs combined. A 1998 study by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism reports that if a teen starts to drink at 15, he or she has a 40 percent chance of alcoholism or alcohol dependence as an adult.

Marijuana affects alertness, concentration, perception, coordination and reaction time, many of the skills required for safe driving and other tasks. These effects can last up to 24 hours after smoking marijuana. Marijuana use can also make it difficult to judge distances and react to signals and sounds on the road.

Regular use of marijuana leads to some changes in the brain that are similar to those caused by cocaine, heroin or alcohol.



## Signs and Symptoms

How can you tell if your child is using drugs? It is difficult because changes in mood or attitudes, unusual temper outbursts, changes in sleeping habits,

changes in hobbies or other interests are common in teens.

### WHAT SHOULD YOU LOOK FOR?

Negative changes in schoolwork; missing school or declining grades

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

New friends

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

Evidence of inhaling products and accessories, such as hairspray, nail polish, correction fluid, paper bags and rags, common household products

Bottles of eyedrops, 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 troubling is going on and may involve alcohol or drugs.

## Your Teen Is at a Crossroads

Parents are sometimes afraid that they will push their children away by talking to them about drug use. You may be worried that your child will get in trouble with the law and that it may

affect his or her ability to qualify for scholarships or get a job. But kids who make a choice — one or more times — to use drugs or alcohol are at a crossroads and need your help. Overcoming your own fears is an important step in getting help for your child.

Family members — even parents — sometimes introduce kids to drugs. Parents need to acknowledge their own problem if they are going to help their children with theirs.

The most important thing to remember is that it is never too early or too late to take action regarding your kid’s drug use. Parents are the most important part of a kid’s life; your actions on their behalf can make a difference.

## What Do You Do and When?

When you have a suspicion, what do you do? First, learn as much as you can. Check out [www.TheAntiDrug.com](http://www.TheAntiDrug.com) or [www.freevibe.com](http://www.freevibe.com) for information on drug and alcohol use by teens.

Or, you can call the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI) for free pamphlets and fact sheets. They’ll even send the information in a plain envelope, if you wish. They can be reached at 1-800-788-2800.

The next thing you can do is sit down and talk with your child. Be sure to have the conversation when all of you are calm and have plenty of time. This isn’t an easy task. Your feelings may range from anger to guilt, or you may feel that you have “failed” because your kid is using drugs. This isn’t true. By staying involved, you can help them stop using drugs and make choices that will make a positive difference in their lives.

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 that you found drug paraphernalia (or empty bottles or cans). Explain exactly how their behavior or appearance (bloodshot eyes, different clothing) has changed and why that worries you. Tell them you’ve noticed that they have new friends that you don’t necessarily know or approve of.

It is important to set clear ground rules in your family about drug and alcohol use — e.g., in this family, we don’t smoke marijuana — and to let your kids know that you will enforce these rules.

Have this discussion without getting mad or accusing your child of being stupid or bad or an embarrassment to the family. Knowing that kids are naturally private about their lives, try to find out what's going on in your child's life. What is he doing? When was the last time he used? Did he do anything that he regrets? Try not to make the discussion an inquisition; simply try to connect with your teen. Find out if friends or others offered your child drugs at a party or school. Did they try it just out of curiosity, or did they take the initiative to use marijuana or alcohol for some other reason? That alone will be a signal to your child that you take your responsibility as a parent seriously and that you will exercise your parental rights.

#### HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTED THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN YOU TALK TO YOUR CHILD

Tell your son or daughter you LOVE him/her and that you are worried that he/she might be using drugs or alcohol.

Say that: 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 them when they do drugs;

You are there to LISTEN to them;

You WANT them to be a part of the solution;

What you will do to HELP them.

Know that you will have this discussion many, many times. Talking to your kids about drugs and alcohol is not a one-time event.

Be prepared for your teen to deny using drugs. Don't expect them to admit they have a problem. Your child will probably get angry and might try to change the subject. Maybe you'll be confronted with questions about what you did as a kid. If you are asked, experts agree that it is best to be honest. 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 may decide that the time is not right to discuss your previous drug use. As with other possibly sensitive topics such as sex, you should talk about it when you're ready. 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 thought I needed to in order to fit in. We didn't know as much as we do now about all the bad things that can happen when you smoke marijuana or use other drugs — especially when you are a teenager. If I'd known then about the consequences, I never would have tried drugs, and I'll do everything I can to help keep you away from them."*

*"Everybody makes mistakes. When I used drugs, I made a big one. I'm telling you this, even though it's embarrassing, because I love you and I want to save you from making the same stupid decision I made when I was your age."*

*"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."*



#### ENABLING YOUR CHILD'S DRUG USE

You're not helping your child if you make excuses when you know your child misses school or family functions because of "not feeling well," especially when you suspect something else is at play. Take the next step: Get more information and talk to your child.



When do you take action? Sooner rather than later is always the best. You can immediately begin to more closely monitor your child's activities. Have a few conversations. Ask why he/she is using drugs. Get to know your kid's friends and their parents. When you get a better idea of the situation, then you can decide what the next steps should be. These could include setting new rules and consequences that are reasonable and enforceable — such as a new, earlier 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 new or other activities that will keep them busy and help them meet new people. For more information about how to address your teen's alcohol and drug use and how to set and enforce rules, go to [www.TheAntiDrug.com](http://www.TheAntiDrug.com).

## Do You Think You've Uncovered a Problem?

The most important thing you can do is to not deny its existence. If you don't think you can handle it yourself, ask for help. You

are not alone. Many parents have been in your shoes. Find them for support and insight. Contact someone at your child's school. Remember, school staff can be your best ally. While it may be difficult to get past the feelings of embarrassment and failure, the truth is asking for help is the best thing you can do for your child, yourself and your family. The most important thing is for you to take action on your child's behalf — help him/her stop using drugs and alcohol. Look to your community for resources to help you.

THERE ARE MANY PREVENTION AND TREATMENT SPECIALISTS WHO CAN GUIDE AND INFORM YOU

School counselors and student assistance professionals

Employee assistance professionals

Family doctors or pediatricians

Nurses

Faith leaders

Community health centers

Adolescent prevention or treatment professionals

Local community anti-drug coalitions

Ask your child if there is someone they trust or feel comfortable talking to. They shouldn't necessarily make the final decision, but they are more likely to be an active participant if they have a say in what happens.

Take your child to the doctor or talk to the school nurse 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. Drug testing of kids is a complicated issue and is best done within the context of a doctor-patient-parent relationship. Sharing your concerns with your health professional can help you get the advice and assistance you need. If you have an appointment with your child's doctor, call ahead to make time to discuss this issue.

It may also help to talk to other parents who have experienced what you are going through. You may feel as though you are the only family dealing with this issue, but know that there are parent support groups in your community.



## Parents Are the Most Important Influence in a Child's Life

Research shows that parents are central to preventing teen drug use. In fact, kids themselves say that losing their parents' trust and respect are the most important reasons not to use drugs. As a parent, your actions matter. When you suspect, or know, that your child has been drinking or using drugs, take action to stop it as soon as you can. It may be the most important step you ever take.