



Signs of Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Despite all of your efforts to keep your child drug and alcohol free, one day you might suspect that your son or daughter may be using drugs or alcohol. What are some of the physical and behavioral signs to look out for?

Physical Signs:

- Eyes may be red, watery, glassy, enlarged pupils
- Poor motor coordination (drops things, clumsy)
- Skin injuries (rashes, abrasions, bruises)
- Change in face (puffiness, excessive paleness, blushing)
- Shaking or twitching in the hands, legs, feet or head
- Speech is affected (slurred, rapid talking)
- Walking is impaired (staggering, walking very slowly, off balance)
- Nose and throat changes (nose bleeds, runny nose, hacking cough)
- Unexplained illness (vomiting, nausea, excessive sweating, dizziness, fainting)

Behavioral Signs:

- Change in sleep patterns (either too much or too little)
- Change in eating habits
- Poor hygiene/neglecting appearance
- Impaired thinking (paranoia, irrational thoughts, bizarre thoughts, destructive thoughts)
- Decline in grades, missing schoolwork, lack of motivation
- Missing school (increased absences and tardiness)
- Mood changes (depressed, anxious, crying jags, hostile outbursts)
- Friend changes (not spending time with old friends and not introducing new friends to parents)
- Withdrawal from usual activities (dropping a sport, music hobbies)
- Secretive behavior (locking bedroom door, unaccounted whereabouts, hesitant to answer parent questions)
- Child just does not “seem right”

Maybe you came across some things in your child’s bedroom or overheard a conversation not meant for you. Whatever the signal, a red flag has been raised. What do you do next? Should you say or do something? Who can you turn to for help?

What Should a Parent do if they Suspect?

- Get informed; Helpful websites such as www.theantidrug.com and www.freevibe.com can help parents get more information. Also The National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI) can send you free information pamphlets and fact sheets and can be reached at 800-788-2800.
- Have a conversation with your child. Parents remain their strongest influence.