

What's a Family to Do?

How to find help and answers if you suspect teen alcohol or other drug use

By 12th grade, *nearly one-third* of teens have used an illicit drug, and *almost half* have consumed alcohol.* Teen alcohol and other drug use is commonplace, and parents need to take a closer look if you suspect your son or daughter is using. Even if addiction is not in the picture, teen experimentation with alcohol and other drugs can result in severe and lasting consequences—accidents, unintentional overdoses, violence, sexual trauma, and legal issues.

Hazelden shares the following common signs of teen drug use along with steps to take if use is discovered.

1. Look for the signs.

Physical and behavioral signs of drinking or other drug use can be subtle or obvious, such as:

- Changes in eating and sleeping habits, extreme hyperactivity, tremors, red or watery eyes
- Sudden changes in emotion such as loss of interest, lack of motivation, depression, dishonesty, moodiness, or isolation
- Poor school attendance or deterioration in grades
- Stealing or unaccounted for money
- Deterioration of appearance

In some cases, warning signs might be self-evident, such as possession of drug paraphernalia. In other cases, a combination of seemingly unrelated incidents over a short period of time might indicate trouble, such as disobeying curfew, having a car accident, or stealing money.

2. Ignoring warning signs doesn't make a potential drug problem go away. It enables further use.

Early detection of drinking or other drug use gives your family the opportunity to take a closer look, find answers, and get help. If you have concerns, take action. Talk with a professional who can help you determine whether your child's behavior warrants a drug and alcohol abuse assessment.

If you haven't talked with your son or daughter yet about drinking and other drug use, begin today. Set clear limits and communicate your expectations regularly, focusing on your concerns about their overall health and safety. If you don't want your child to use alcohol until he or she reaches the legal drinking age of 21, say so. Know where your kids are going and who they are hanging out with; know the parents of their friends.

While the physical and behavioral signs of drug use discussed above are intended as general guidelines to help parents recognize potential problems, you have another equally important indicator: parental intuition. If your instincts tell you something is wrong, it probably is. And it's time to ask your son or daughter, "What's going on?"

Talk early. Talk often.

"Set clear rules and consequences around drinking and other drug use, and communicate your expectations regularly with your kids."

—Heather
Youngstrand,
BS, LADC

Manager of Intake
and Admissions
Hazelden in Plymouth

3. Involve other people.

If you discover alcohol or other drug use by your child, you don't need to go it alone. Many people can help you intervene, including your family doctor, your child's school counselor, or an addiction counselor.

4. Get educated.

If addiction treatment is needed, know your options and don't hesitate to ask questions, such as:

- **Is the program accredited or licensed?** National accreditation programs (such as the Joint Commission, the National Committee for Quality Assurance and the All-States) look for elements of treatment that research has shown to be effective.
- **Are staff members licensed or credentialed?** Credentials held by addiction professionals include LADC (licensed alcohol and drug counselor), LPC (licensed professional counselor), CAC (certified addictions counselor), or CCDP (certified co-occurring disorders counselor).
- **Does the program use evidence-based practices?** A treatment center should be measuring how effective their services are as well as using research-based methods.
- **Is gender-specific programming offered?** Research shows males and females recover from addiction differently and have the best opportunity for recovery when separated by gender.
- **Are detoxification services offered?** Comprehensive, medically-supervised detoxification ensures that your child is medically stabilized before beginning the treatment process.
- **Is programming individualized?** Each person's needs are unique and require an individualized treatment plan based on specific history, issues and needs.
- **Are treatment services holistic?** Effective programs address mental, physical, and spiritual health.

5. Family involvement matters, too.

Studies show recovery from addiction is stronger and more effective when family members are educated and involved. Unfortunately, the social stigma of addiction often prevents families from acknowledging that a problem may exist—and from getting help when needed. Blame and shame are typically involved. As a parent, it's important to realize you can't control your child's addiction, but you can take responsibility for your own health and happiness. You can love your son or daughter and, at the same time, dislike his or her behaviors. For help and support, turn to professionals or find a local Al-Anon meeting. You will find practical tools to empower your family's journey on the path of recovery.

* "Monitoring the Future" 2012 national study on adolescent drug use



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Hazelden, a national nonprofit organization founded in 1949,
helps people reclaim their lives from the disease of addiction.