

Hidden in Plain Sight

Today's teen drug culture has a friend in technology

Take a quick tour of today's most popular drug-culture websites and you'll find celebrity-endorsed product reviews of the latest paraphernalia for consuming drugs, how-to videos on making the most potent strains, and dosage advice for achieving the "best high" from any type or form of drug. This burgeoning online drug culture wields unprecedented influence on today's adolescents and young adults.

The Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation specializes in assessment and treatment of addiction and co-occurring disorders for young people ages 12–25. Experts at our Plymouth, Minnesota, campus explain that young people who search the web for information about marijuana, prescription pills, and other drugs are also finding something else: affirmation. Program supervisor Jim Wynne, LADC, closely follows teen drug-abuse trends, particularly the recent resurgence in marijuana addiction. Below he discusses four important trends parents should know about.

1. Teens have ready access to vast amounts of dubious, if not dangerous, information.

Popular websites such as erowid.org provide a clearinghouse of information about psychoactive drugs, including detailed descriptions, dosage advice, effects of using, slang, and FAQs. When young people search online for information about drugs, they can also find encouragement, affirmation, and even a sense of belonging. Many online sources tend to minimize the dangers and risks of drug use, normalizing the behavior and, in some cases, romanticizing or glorifying use.

2. Marijuana continues to gain popularity among young people.

Marijuana is the primary drug of dependence among the 12- to 25-year-olds admitted for treatment at Hazelden. Nearly 80 percent of the 900-plus adolescent and young adults admitted to treatment at Hazelden between April 2013 and April 2014 ascribed cannabis as a primary drug of dependence:

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|------------------------|-----|-------------------------|-----|
| Cannabis | 78% | Barbituates | 13% |
| Alcohol | 51% | Cocaine | 7% |
| Opioids | 35% | Hallucinogens | 3% |
| Amphetamines | 18% | Other | 1% |

3. Synthetic drugs hold special appeal to teens.

An ever-evolving array of easily accessible synthetic drugs are marketed to teens as “legal,” “natural,” and “safe” alternatives to illicit drugs. Designed to mimic the effects of hallucinogens or amphetamines, these synthetic drugs contain mystery concoctions of plants and chemicals and are often packaged innocuously as incense or potpourri. Chemicals used in many such synthetics are also not easily detected in drug tests.

4. Illicit drugs have never been more accessible to adolescents and young adults.

In the 2009 National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse, teens reported that marijuana was as easy for them to buy as cigarettes and that they could purchase prescription pain pills and other opioids more readily than beer. The most recent Minneapolis/St. Paul Minnesota Drug Abuse Trends report shows a dangerous surge in opiate abuse, in particular. According to the report, heroin and other opioid addiction escalated in the Twin Cities in 2013, with record-high treatment admissions for heroin dependence and opioid-related overdose deaths increasing markedly. Hospital emergency department visits for heroin nearly tripled from 2004 to 2011. Another disturbing trend chronicled in the report: Exposures to LSD reported to the Hennepin Regional Poison Center tripled from 2012 to 2013.

“Today’s drug culture is incredibly enticing to young people. Websites and other online resources create a perception of minimized dangers and risks.”

—**Jim Wynne, LADC**
*Program Supervisor
Hazelden*

5. Parents provide a powerful antidote to today’s teen drug culture.

While scare tactics and threats do little in preventing teen drug use, proactively and consistently engaging your son or daughter in conversations about what’s going on in their world can be extremely effective. Hundreds of young people find freedom from addiction every year through Hazelden’s programs for adolescents and young adults.

6. The other good news? Treatment works.

Young people can and do get sober every day. Hundreds of young people find freedom from addiction every year through Hazelden’s adolescent and young adult services. Families find help and support at Hazelden too. Learn more today by visiting hazelden.org/youth or by calling **855-348-7047**.

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