

tool kit for teen care

Alcohol and Other Drug Use



What is substance abuse?

- The misuse of illegal and prescription drugs, alcohol, or tobacco. For information on common drugs, go to the “Common Drugs of Abuse” fact sheet.
- Any drug that is illegal is an illicit drug. Laws exist that prohibit the use of these drugs.
- A licit drug is one that has been licensed to use, for example, a drug that is legal to use if prescribed by a doctor.
- Alcohol and tobacco are legal for individuals of a certain age.

Who is at risk for substance abuse?

- More than half of all young people have tried an illicit drug by the time they finish high school.
- Binge drinking, five or more drinks on one occasion, is increasing, with approximately 1 in 3 high-school students saying that they binge drink at least once a month.
- Males are more likely to abuse drugs; however, with low support from parents and high peer drug use, female adolescents show increased use of drugs and depression when stress occurs.
- The following factors increase a person’s risk for substance abuse:
 - Using substances that alter thinking (including tobacco) at a young age.
 - Having friends who use drugs.
 - Having family problems.
 - Having a family history of alcohol abuse.
 - Having a personal history of emotional or behavioral problems.

What are the signs of substance abuse?

- As seen by the teen:
 - When going places, chooses a place where drugs are available
 - It takes more drugs to get high than in the past
 - More drugs are taken than had been planned

- As seen by others:
 - Worsening school performance
 - Rebellion against or loss of interest in religion and family
 - Decreased control of emotions
 - Showing aggression (violent behavior) around other people
 - Changing friends to those who abuse drugs

What are the general consequences of substance abuse?

- Teens are more likely to engage in risky behaviors, such as unprotected sexual activity if they are using alcohol or drugs.
- Use or abuse of drugs is linked to mental diseases (obsessive behavior, schizophrenia, chronic psychosis). As use increases, mood and social personality disorders increase. (This consequence is linked to the abuse of hallucinogens, but also seem to be associated with the abuse of many substances.)
- Children of drug abusing parents have more mental disorders.
- Most of the bad effects of drugs continue to become worse as the teen abuses more drugs.

What decreases the likelihood of substance abuse?

- Parental emotional support—emotional support seems more important than any specific educational approach.
- Getting help for nonsubstance-abuse problems—substance abuse is rarely the first problem. It more often follows other problem behaviors.
- Dealing with substance abuse early—use or abuse of one substance, eg tobacco or alcohol, often comes before abuse of other substances.
- Having good role models (parents, teachers, older sisters and brothers).
- Getting parents or other adults involved early seems to do the most good in decreasing drug use.





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What can be done when a teen is a substance abuser?

Primary intervention—by anyone, including friends and family

- Remove the teen from the environment that has drugs and provide new activities as well as changes in peers.

Secondary intervention—help asked for by others, not done directly by friends or family

- Get the teen involved in programs that address adolescent drug abuse. Many are run or monitored by school counselors or community or church programs, or talk to the teen's medical doctor.

Tertiary intervention—help asked for by school counselor, physicians, or police

- Emergency medical care for acute or chronic effects given in hospital or residential treatment centers.

For More Information

We have provided information on the following organizations and web sites because they have information that may be of interest to our readers. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists does not necessarily endorse the views expressed or the facts presented by these organizations or on these web sites. Further, ACOG does not endorse any commercial products that may be advertised or available from these organizations or on these web sites.

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Elk Grove Village, IL 60007-1098
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www.aap.org

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
409 12th Street SW
PO Box 96920
Washington, DC 20090-6290
Telephone: (202) 863-2497
Fax: (202) 484-3917
www.acog.org

Drug Strategies
1150 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Suite 800
Washington, DC 20036
Telephone: (202) 289-9070
www.drugstrategies.org

Join Together
441 Stuart Street, 7th Floor
Boston, MA 02116
Telephone: (617) 437-1500
www.jointogether.org

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information
PO Box 2345
Rockville, MD 20847-2345
Telephone: 800-729-6686, (301) 468-2600
www.health.org

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
6001 Executive Boulevard, Room 5213
Bethesda, MD 20892-9561
Telephone: (301) 443-1124
www.niaaa.nih.gov

National Institute on Drug Abuse
5600 Fishers Lane, Room 10A03
Rockville, MD 20857
Telephone: (301) 443-1124
www.nida.nih.gov

Partnership for a Drug Free America
405 Lexington Avenue, 16th Floor
New York, NY 10174
www.drugfreeamerica.org

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville MD 20857
Telephone: (301) 443-8956
www.samhsa.gov