

WHAT PARENTS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ...

## The Danger Signals of Substance Abuse



"If only we'd known!"

**T**hat's what parents usually say when they find out their son or daughter is abusing alcohol or other drugs. The fact is that parents often are the last to find out—and by the time they do, their child may already be addicted.

Know the danger signals that a child may be abusing drugs or alcohol. You owe it to yourself—and your child—to get the facts.



## Why do kids use drugs?

**Y**oung people often experiment with drugs because they are curious. They want to fit in with their friends and they want to do something that will help them find their own identities. Studies show that peer pressure is the most frequent reason young people first use drugs.

Kids, just like adults, use drugs because they like what they do to their brains. Whether they are chasing a euphoric rush or seeking to reduce social inhibitions and feel more confident, they like the way drugs make them feel. *This is drug abuse.*

Prolonged drug use, at some point, causes fundamental, observable changes in the user's brain, resulting in drug craving and dependence. *This is drug addiction.*

## What are physical signs that my child may be using drugs?

**P**hysical signs that a child may be using drugs can vary with each child and the drug being abused. However, some common physical changes warrant your attention. If you notice any of these sudden and marked physical changes in your child, consider them as warning signs:

- Change in sleeping patterns.
- Bloodshot or glassy eyes.
- Sudden gain or loss of weight.
- Smelling of alcohol or marijuana.
- Burn marks on fingers.
- Constant fatigue.
- Hyper-excitability.
- Poor coordination.

Realize that not all signs may be present and that some signs can also indicate other problems. Consult your physician to rule out physical causes.



## How may my child's behavior change if he's using drugs?

The best clue that a child may be using drugs is a change in behavior. A normally energetic child suddenly becomes very depressed. An outgoing child suddenly stops communicating with anyone.



Here are some other behavior changes that may be signals of drug abuse:

- **A sudden change in friends.** Your child may start to spend time with friends who will not meet or talk with you.
- **A sudden withdrawal from activities.** Your child may lose interest in the activities he used to enjoy.
- **School problems.** Your child may stop doing homework. He may start skipping class. His grades may drop.
- **Mood swings.** Your child may experience emotional highs or depression. Most mind-altering drugs produce mood swings.
- **Lack of honesty.** Your child may lie about where he's going, what he's doing or who he'll be with. Addicts lie and manipulate. You need to find out the truth.



*I'm not sure, but I suspect my child may be using drugs.*

## What should I do?

Trust your instincts. Many parents deny what their eyes and ears tell them. Still others try to tell themselves that what they're seeing is "just normal growing up."

If you suspect your child is using drugs, be honest. Tell your child what you've seen and what you suspect. Stick to the facts—let your child know the physical, mental and legal consequences of what she is doing.

If you have specific evidence that your child is using drugs (you find drugs or drug paraphernalia in her room, for example), you need to take stronger action. Confront her with what you have found.

Place restrictions on your child—set curfews and monitor contact with certain friends. Also, keep a close watch on how much money your child has.

## Where can I get help?



If your child is using drugs, you probably won't be able to solve the problem alone. Treatment is available in a variety of forms. To learn what treatment options are available in your community, check with your school counselor, doctor, local mental health center, or call the National Helpline at:

**1-800-662-4357**

## Remember...

Drug use is a preventable behavior.

Drug addiction is a treatable disease.

Don't think that your child could never abuse drugs.

Your loving vigilance now can prevent problems that could ruin your child's life tomorrow.

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One of a series of *QuickTips*® from The Parent Institute®,  
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Stock No. 1148 (English) • Stock No. 2148 (Spanish)  
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