

S u s p e c t i n g t h a t y o u r c h i l d i s u s i n g d r u g s

Do you have reason to suspect (or do you know) that your child has used illegal drugs OR is misusing legal drugs? Then, unfortunately, your suspicions are probably well founded! Most often, as parents we want to believe and trust our children. Especially, even when we KNOW there is a problem, like most drug-users themselves we are simply in DENIAL. As a result, we are too slow in taking the action steps necessary to prevent a substance abuse problem from escalating into a crisis (and perhaps life-threatening) situation.

But don't many people use drugs without losing control? Some start that way, but drug-use tends to escalate with time. Using "a little" turns into using "a lot". Also, there is often a "gateway" effect: the initial use of what many perceive as less serious drugs (e.g., marijuana) can lead to the use of more serious drugs (e.g., heroin); sporadic use can develop into chronic use; and people who never considered addiction a possibility for themselves personally can become desperate addicts. Further, the psychology of addiction is such that it includes a process of denial; addicts very seldom admit their addiction voluntarily.

Young people use drugs for many reasons that have to do with how they feel about themselves, how they get along with others, and how they live. No one factor determines who will use drugs and who will not, but here are some predictors:

- early initiation of substance use;
- attitudes favorable toward drug use;
- friends' substance use;
- perceived risks of substance use;
- sensation seeking;
- perceived availability of substances; and
- parental attitudes favorable toward substance use

First, rule out any physical illness with a trip to the doctor. Ask the doctor to evaluate for depression or other emotional causes as well. If there is a clean bill of health, and the symptoms are still present, locate a professional (psychiatrist, psychologist or counselor) with experience in adolescent drug use.

W h a t d o y o u l o o k f o r ?

Kids may "try" for the first time for any of these reasons:

- curiosity
- for fun
- to fit in
- to do what friends are doing
- to escape from pain
- boredom
- to take a risk
- ignorance of the effects
- thrill-seeking
- mimicking inappropriate adult behavior
- lack of appropriate values

S y m p t o m s o f d r u g a b u s e

While one of these symptoms may not indicate a drug problem, a combination of two or more may be a warning to parents. Here is a helpful word to remember in identifying drug use in your child:

- Impulsive. Drug-abusive children become increasingly selfish and impulsive
- Recent drop in grades
- Resistance to authority increases
- Inability to keep promises or commitment
- Tough new group of friends. Peer pressure is often the main reason children use drugs
- Ambivalent feelings, low self-esteem, diminished interest
- Blaming and argumentative; turning situations around, inappropriate anger, hostility, irritability
- Lying, dishonesty
- Escape or withdrawal from the family. Physical signs may also occur: memory lapses, shortened attention span, difficulty in concentration, poor physical coordination, unhealthy appearance, lack of hygiene and grooming, bloodshot eyes, dilated pupils

S i g n s i n t h e h o m e

- loss of interest in family activities
- disrespect for family rules
- withdrawal from responsibilities
- verbally or physically abusive
- sudden increase or decrease in appetite
- disappearance of valuable items or money
- not coming home on time
- not telling you where they are going
- constant excuses for behaviour
- spending a lot of time in their rooms
- lies about activities
- Odor of drugs, smell of incense or other "cover-up" scents
- finding the following: cigarette rolling papers, pipes, roach clips, small glass vials, plastic baggies, remnants of drugs (seeds, etc.)

S i g n s a t s c h o o l

- sudden drop in grades
- non-attendance
- loss of interest in learning
- sleeping in class
- poor work performance
- not doing homework
- defiant of authority
- poor attitude towards sports or other extracurricular activities
- reduced memory and attention span
- not informing you of teacher meetings, open houses, etc.

P h y s i c a l a n d e m o t i o n a l s i g n s

- changes friends
- hostile, uncooperative
- poor physical coordination, slurred or incoherent speech
- eyes: bloodshot eyes, bags, glassy, dull
- skin: sallow, premature wrinkling
- suffering from deteriorating relationships with family members
- losing interest in hobbies, sports, and other favorite activities
- smell of alcohol or 'other' on breath or body
- unexplainable mood swings and behavior
- negative, argumentative, paranoid or confused, destructive, anxious
- over-reacts to criticism acts rebellious
- sharing few if any of their personal problems
- doesn't seem as happy as they used to be
- overly tired or hyperactive
- drastic weight loss or gain
- unhappy and depressed
- cheats, steals
- always needs money, or has excessive amounts of money
- sloppiness in appearance

B o d i l y s i g n s

- loss of appetite, increase in appetite, any changes in eating habits, unexplained weight loss or gain
- slowed or staggering walk; poor physical coordination
- inability to sleep, awake at unusual times, unusual laziness
- red, watery eyes; pupils larger or smaller than usual; blank stare
- cold, sweaty palms; shaking hands
- puffy face, blushing or paleness
- smell of substance on breath, body or clothes
- extreme hyperactivity; excessive talkativeness
- runny nose; hacking cough
- more sensitivity to smell, touch or taste
- extra large or small pupils of the eyes
- severe unexplained headaches
- constant excessive unexplained coughing
- needle marks on lower arm, leg or bottom of feet
- nausea, vomiting or excessive sweating
- tremors or shakes of hands, feet or head
- irregular heartbeat

B e h a v i o r a l s i g n s

- change in overall attitude/personality with no other identifiable cause
- changes in friends; new hang-outs; sudden avoidance of old crowd; doesn't want to talk about new friends; friends are known drug users
- change in activities or hobbies
- excessive giggling
- disorientation
- drop in grades at school or performance at work; skips school or is late for school
- change in habits at home; loss of interest in family and family activities

- difficulty in paying attention; forgetfulness
- general lack of motivation, energy, self-esteem, "I don't care" attitude
- sudden oversensitivity, temper tantrums, or resentful behavior
- moodiness, irritability, or nervousness
- silliness or giddiness
- paranoia
- excessive need for privacy; unreachable
- memory lapses, short attention span, difficulty in concentration
- avoidance of eye contact/ inappropriate wearing of sunglasses
- secretive or suspicious behavior
- car accidents (older children)
- chronic dishonesty
- unexplained need for money, stealing money or items
- change in personal grooming habits
- possession of drug paraphernalia
- conversation and jokes that are preoccupied with drugs
- hostility in discussing drugs
- small medicine bottles
- eye drops (when they have never used this before)
- butane lighters
- drug-related books
- drug-related slogans on clothing
- locked boxes or containers

Positive answers to many of these questions can indicate a possible drug problem. However, these signs may also apply to a child who is not using drugs but who may be having other problems at school or in the family. If you are in doubt, get help. Have your family doctor or local clinic examine your child to rule out illness or other physical problems.

Signs of intoxication

- **Heroin** – ****Jan / Charles
- **Marijuana** - red eyes, dilated pupils, talkativeness, irrelevant giggling
- **Ecstasy, Speed** - dilated pupils, sleeplessness, fidgeting, tremors, hallucinations, talkativeness
- **Cocaine** - dilated pupils, talkativeness, overconfidence, personality change, aggression, runny nose
- **Inhalants** - dilated pupils, blisters or rash around the nose or mouth, nausea and headaches, disorientation, chemical odor on breath
- **Alcohol** – smell of alcohol, in-coordination, slurred speech
- **LSD** - glazed eyes, dilated pupils, over excitement, irrational behavior, hallucinations

What should I be looking out for?

Heroin

- **** Jan / Charles

Marijuana/Hash

- Butt ends of hand rolled cigarettes (joints) especially with card inserts
- Strong herbal type smell of burning leaves
- Torn rizzler papers and cigarette packets
- Cigarette filters with no sign of tar in the filter

- Rolled up pieces of cardboard which have been used as home made filters
- Hash = small blocks of cannabis usually found wrapped in silver paper or clingfilm
- Small plastic money bags containing dried out leaves, may also contain seeds
- Small capsules of oil, about pill size (hash)

Ecstasy

- Tablets of varying colours with emblems on them

Cocaine/ Speed

- Folded wraps of paper containing white powder, similar to talcum powder
- Mirror and razor blade
- Rolled up bank notes
- Traces of powder on flat surfaces

LSD

- Small square pieces of paper with pictures on them

Inhalants(Poppers)

- Bottles or small glass 'vials'