

What to Do if You Suspect Your Child is Abusing Drugs or Alcohol



So what do you do if you think your child is abusing drugs or alcohol? The first thing to try to determine is if there is a pattern of use or whether it's just a one-time occurrence. You must understand that experimentation is inevitable and that finding out that a teenager has had a beer doesn't necessarily mean that he or she is on a direct path to a lifetime of substance abuse. That being said, if you notice that your child is

exhibiting strange behavior, such as a change in sleep routine, sudden withdrawal from family life, change in friendships, falling grades, etc., it may be that he or she is in fact abusing drugs and/or alcohol.

If you truly suspect abuse, the first thing you need to do is to communicate with your child regarding the issue. Ideally, you should come at it with statement of concern and worry rather than as a stern parent. You are much more likely to get the truth out of your teenager if they perceive you as calm rather than angry and are able to feel trust in you. Hopefully you have maintained open communication with your child throughout his or her adolescence, as this will make this difficult conversation easier.

If your child admits to abusing drugs or alcohol, it may be that he or she is tacitly asking for help and may be willing to get the help they need. At this point, you should welcome any willingness to get better and offer no negative consequences for his or her prior actions and proceed with seeking that help to avoid further substance abuse. After all, the primary goal is for your child to get well as soon as possible.

If on the other hand your child is evasive or combative when asked, you may need to seek professional help and have him or her undergo a full chemical use evaluation. This will determine what and how much he or she is using and whether or not treatment is required.

Remember, you as a parent have a lot of power when it comes to insisting your child undergo evaluation for substance abuse. You are in a position to grant or deny access to a variety of electronic devices -

including smart phones, tablets, laptops and video games. You'll be surprised how fast a teen will agree to just about anything if he or she suspects you'll take away his phone or gaming system.

Once a course of action is determined - whether it's work through recommendations in a completed chemical use evaluation or involves clinical treatment in full rehab or outpatient counseling - it is crucial that the pattern of abuse is disrupted. Only then can your child regain stability within themselves and regain your trust and the trust of others and move forward with his or her strengths.

Another critical part of the solution is to consider your own actions. As a parent, you model behavior for your children whether you like it or not. So it can be difficult for them to understand why it's ok for you to drink - or even get drunk - if they're not allowed to. As they get older, they'll likely find this hypocritical and may use it to justify their own substance use. So you should try to moderate your own intake of alcohol while your children are around and provide the best role modeling you can.

Substance abuse happens to even the brightest kids in the best families. It knows neither class nor ethnicity nor educational background. As a parent, your job is to remain hyper-vigilant in order to catch it at an early enough stage that it can be curbed without damaging your child's future and the best way to do that is to remain engaged with your kids as much as possible throughout their adolescence. This builds both trust and communication, which will allow you both to recognize the onset of abuse and to address it when it happens effectively.

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