

5 Signs Your Child is Using Drugs or Alcohol:

*A Guide for
Concerned Parents*



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Parents have so much to worry about today, and one of their greatest concerns is whether their children are using drugs or alcohol. They also may not be sure how to protect their children from these substances as they grow older. Part of the solution is being as educated as possible about drug and alcohol use among children and teenagers.





Youth Alcohol Use is Substantial

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, alcohol is the most commonly used and abused drug among American youth. [1] The current rates of alcohol use among young people are quite alarming. The 2015 CDC Youth Risk Behavior Survey, conducted among US 9-12th grade students, found that 33% of high school students drank some amount of alcohol and 18% binge drank during the past 30 days. [2]

Alcohol Use Among US Youth (Past 30 Days)

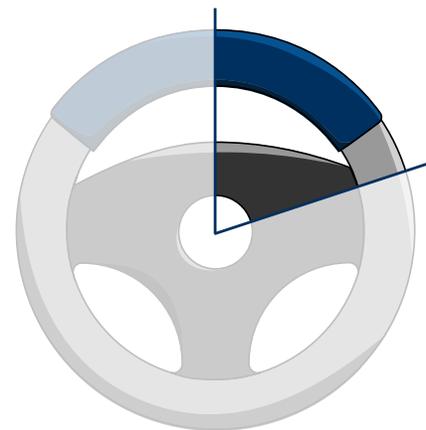


Some Alcohol Use - 33%



Binge Drinking - 18%

Youth alcohol use is concerning for a number of reasons. One of these is the potential for early alcohol use to lead to a potential addiction to alcohol that continues into adulthood. Another cause for concern is the synergistic effect of alcohol lowering inhibitions among an age group already prone to risk-taking and questionable choices. By added alcohol use to the mix, teens are much more likely to make poor decisions that may even have life-threatening consequences. This can include risky sexual activity or things like riding in a vehicle with someone who has consumed alcohol.

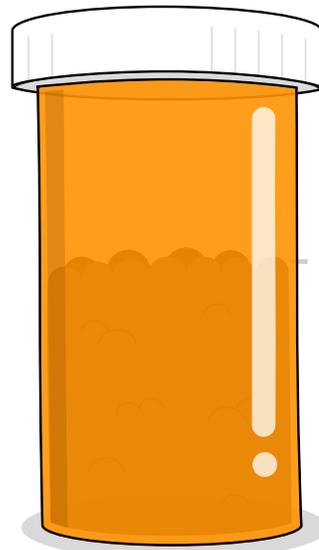


"20% of 9-12th grade students in the US report riding in a vehicle with a driver who had been drinking alcohol." [3]



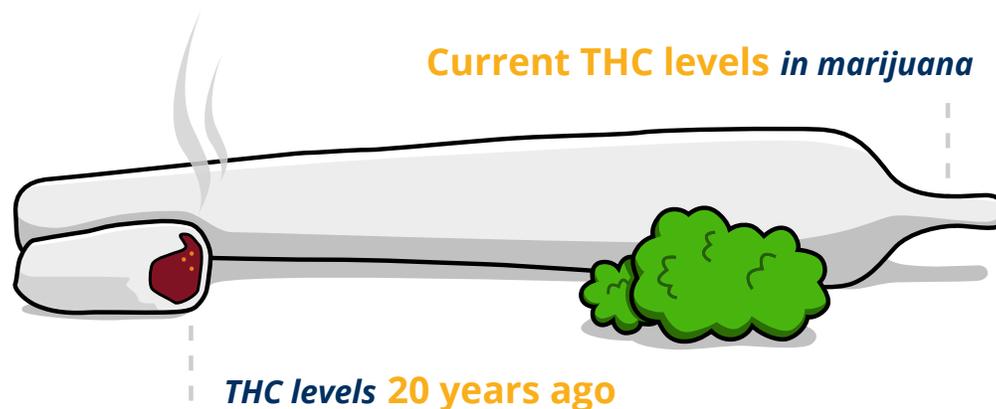
Drug Availability Has Never Been Greater

The statistics on drug use among American youth are just as concerning. One serious source of concern is the increasing availability of prescription drugs to today's young people. According to DoSomething.org, while the United States contains only about 5% of the world's population, it consumes 75% of the world's prescription drugs. The massive quantities of prescription drugs present in medicine cabinets and elsewhere around the country represent an easily accessible supply for teens who might wish to try them. [4]



"60% of teens who abuse prescription medication get them from friends and relatives free of charge." [4]

In addition to the increasing usage of prescription drugs by young people in the US, marijuana use keeps growing among this population. Due to the existence of medical marijuana laws in many states (not to mention legalized or decriminalized recreational usage in some), young people have more sources of marijuana than ever before and often think that marijuana is not a "real drug" due to its increasing social acceptance. However, it is important to realize that marijuana keeps increasing in potency, with the average strain being five times more potent than it was 20 years ago.





Reasons Kids Turn to Drugs and Alcohol

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), people are most likely to begin abusing drugs and alcohol during adolescence and early adulthood. Why do kids start using drugs and alcohol? The following are some of the most common causes:

- The desire for new experiences
- An attempt to deal with problems or improve school performance
- Peer pressure
- Adolescents are at a prime age to seek new experiences and take risks
- The availability of drugs within the neighborhood, community, and school
- Unsupportive family environments including those with violence, physical or emotional abuse, mental illness, and drug use in the household
- An adolescent's inherited genetic vulnerability, like personality traits leading to poor impulse control or mental health conditions like depression or anxiety [6]





5 Signs & Symptoms of Drug and Alcohol Use in Kids & Teens

Unfortunately, there is no easy way to determine whether your child is using drugs and alcohol, because many indicators mimic typical adolescent behavior. Many warning signs also indicate mental health issues like depression and anxiety disorders. The key for parents is to spend time with their kids and determine if they exhibit any changes in behavior or appearance. It's better to err on the side of caution and have conversations with your kids to share your concerns and offer help if you learn that they are using drugs and alcohol. According to Partnership for Drug-Free Kids, parents need to be looking for the following signs and symptoms:

Behavioral Changes

Sudden changes in behavior are a red flag. Look for signs such as changing relationships with family members or friends, frequent breaking of curfew, suddenly being short on cash, avoiding eye contact, being uncharacteristically loud or obnoxious, laughing at nothing, and becoming clumsy. Also, be wary of periods of sleeplessness or high energy followed by long periods of sleep.

Mood and Personality Shifts

Sudden mood swings or emotional instability are strong warning signs. Also, watch for signs of depression or becoming withdrawn, including becoming silent or uncommunicative. Your child also may lack motivation, have an inability to focus, be hostile, or become uncooperative or secretive.

Hygiene and Appearance Issues

While most parents know to watch for bad breath and smells of smoke, you also need to watch for other changes in hygiene, health, and appearance. If he or she suddenly becomes unkempt or has poor hygiene, it's a red flag.

Health Issues

Your child also may have sudden health issues such as being unusually tired or slurring his or her speech. If he or she gets frequent nosebleeds or has a runny nose but no other signs of a cold or allergies, you have cause for concern. You also should look for frequent illnesses, sores or spots around the mouth, vomiting, sudden changes in weight, and excessive thirst or lip wetting.

School Issues

If your child suddenly skips school, gets into trouble, or has failing grades, it is a red flag. Stay in contact with school officials and teachers to get as much information as possible about their concerns. [5]



Additional Reading on Drug and Alcohol Use Among Adolescents

The following resources can give you more information about drug and alcohol use among adolescents. You will find prevention tips in addition to advice for helping your child through recovery if he or she is abusing substances. Parents struggle with knowing whether their kids are using drugs or alcohol. It's important to become educated about the signs and symptoms of substance abuse and have frank conversations with your child, offering your help or support without being judgmental.



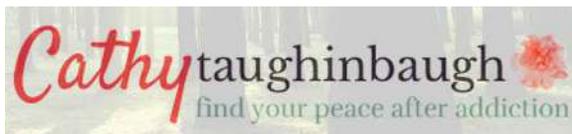
HealthyChildren.org's
[Drug Abuse Prevention Starts with Parents](#)



Parenting's
[10 Ways to Try to Prevent Drug Addiction in Your Child](#)



Partnership for Drug-Free Kids'
[6 Things to Do Before Your Kid Comes Home from Addiction Treatment](#)



Cathy Taughinbaugh's
[35 Ways to Help Prevent Your Teen from Using Drugs Before They are 21](#)



Get Your Child the Help They Need

If you are concerned that your child is using drugs or alcohol, the first step is to educate yourself about the signs and symptoms of substance abuse. By using the information in this eBook and the additional resources mentioned above, you will be better prepared to deal with this critical challenge that many young people are confronting today. If you then determine that your child has a problem with drug or alcohol use, don't hesitate to get them the help that they need. The trained staff at Behavioral Wellness and Recovery can help your child get back on track to having a happy and healthy childhood. All you need to do is call them at **800-683-4457** today.

Sources:

[1] **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking**

<https://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/calls/underage-drinking-family-guide.pdf>

[2] **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey**

https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/trends/2015_us_alcohol_trend_yrbs.pdf

[3] **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey**

https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/trends/2015_us_injury_trend_yrbs.pdf

[4] **DoSomething.org**

<https://www.dosomething.org/us/facts/11-facts-about-teens-and-drug-use>

[5] **Partnership for Drug-Free Kids**

<https://drugfree.org/article/look-for-warning-signs/>

[6] **National Institute on Drug Abuse**

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/principles-adolescent-substance-use-disorder-treatment-research-based-guide/introduction>