

# Quest 180°

Christ Centered Recovery

How Can I Recognize if My Teen has a

## Drug Abuse Problem?

Certain factors predispose teenagers to drug abuse. These include a family history of substance abuse, a history of depression and low self-esteem, feelings of not fitting in, and dropping out of the mainstream. A smoking habit has likewise been correlated with substance abuse. Teens who smoke are eight times more likely to use marijuana, and twenty-two times more likely to use cocaine. By knowing the specific warning signs and monitoring your teenager's behaviors, you can intervene earlier if a problem develops.

Focus Adolescent Services lists five areas to evaluate for help in determining if a drug problem is present in your teen:

### Physical Warning Signs

- fatigue
- repeated health complaints
- red and glazed eyes
- lasting cough
- poor personal hygiene

### Emotional Warning Signs

- personality change
- sudden mood changes
- irritability
- irresponsible behavior
- poor judgment
- general lack of interest

### Family Dynamics

- starting arguments
- negative attitude
- breaking rules
- withdrawing from family
- secretiveness
- requests for money

### School Behaviors

- decreased interest
- negative attitude
- drop in grades
- many absences
- truancy
- discipline problems

### Social Problems

- new friends who make poor decisions and are not interested in school or family activities
- problems with the law
- changes to less conventional styles in dress and music

None of these symptoms by themselves definitively point to a drug abuse or addiction problem. They could be the result of an undetected medical condition or other psychological issues. It is important to seek the advice of a mental health expert for evaluation and withhold making a diagnosis of drug abuse based solely on your observations.

### How can I talk with my teenager about drugs?

The website [www.teen-drug-abuse.org](http://www.teen-drug-abuse.org) offers tips on how to talk to teens about drug use:

**Educate yourself.** Find out about the issues. Check with local schools, agencies and information services for the resources you will need. Find books at the local library. The more informed you are, the easier it will be to discuss the issues.

**Be accessible and open-minded.** The idea is to open a dialogue. Listen to what your teens have to say. Ask questions and do not judge.

**Be clear.** Your main message should be clearly stated: "Don't use drugs" should be the core theme of your discussions.

**Keep it relaxed.** Avoid the "We have to talk" approach. Relax and talk about it over supper or when you're driving to the mall. If you are casual, it will help your children to be more honest and willing to talk.

**Grab opportunities.** Use teachable moments. If you have just seen a TV show or poster that discusses the issue, use this to allow the discussion to come up naturally.

**Discuss peer pressure.** Talk about ways to say no and how to deal with the pressures to conform and fit in.

**Practice what you preach.** Kids imitate adults. If you abuse drugs yourself, no matter what you tell your teens, your actions speak louder than words. Avoid being a hypocrite; perhaps it is time that you examine your own problem first.

[www.helpguide.org](http://www.helpguide.org)

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How Can I Tell if My Teen has a

## Drinking Problem?

Alcohol is the number one drug of choice among young people. Teens consume more alcohol than all other illicit drugs combined. Knowing the warning signals of alcohol use in your teen can help lead to early intervention, and can make a huge difference in your child's recovery.

Certain warning signs indicate that your child may have a drinking problem. One or two of these signs are common in all children, especially teens, as they are adjusting to the bodily and social changes that are a part of their particular stage of life. It is advisable to have a talk with your child, however, if you notice several of the following signs:

- The odor of alcohol
- Change in attendance or performance at school
- Discipline problems at school
- Alcohol disappearing from your home
- Secrecy
- Sudden change in mood or attitude
- Loss of interest in school, sports, or other activities
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Depression and developmental difficulties
- Association with a new group of friends and reluctance to introduce them to you

### How can I talk to my child about alcohol?

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism gives some practical strategies for bringing up the subject of alcohol use with your child:

**Encourage conversation.** Encourage your child to talk about whatever interests him or her. Listen without interruption and give your child a chance to teach you something new. Active listening to your child's enthusiasms paves the way for conversations about topics that concern you.

**Ask open-ended questions.** Encourage your teen to tell you how he or she thinks and feels about the issue you're discussing. Avoid questions that invite only a simple "yes" or "no" answer.

**Control your emotions.** If you hear something you don't like, try not to respond with anger. Instead, take a few deep breaths and acknowledge your feelings in a constructive way.

**Make every conversation a "win-win" experience.** Don't lecture or try to "score points" on your teen by showing how he or she is wrong. If you show respect for your child's viewpoint, he or she will be more likely to listen to and respect yours.

**Draw the line.** Set clear, realistic expectations for your child's behavior. Establish appropriate consequences for breaking rules and consistently enforce them.