

HOW CAN I TELL IF MY CHILD IS USING DRUGS?

One of the questions asked increasingly by parents is "How can I tell if my child is using drugs?" This is a most difficult question when signs and symptoms associated with behavior are used as a basis for (knowing) suspicion. It is difficult to separate the typical adolescent behavior from the drug-induced behavior; but the parent should consider the following behavior suspect:

1. Does the child seem to be changing . . .

Is the child becoming more: irritable, less affectionate, secretive, unpredictable, hostile, depressed, uncooperative, apathetic, withdrawn, sullen, easily provoked, over sensitive?

2. Is the child becoming less responsible?

Is the child: not doing chores, late coming home, tardy at school, forgetful of family occasions (birthdays, etc.), no cutting grass, allowing room to be untidy, not completing homework?

3. Is the child changing friends, dress code or interests?

Has the child: a new group of friends, the language of new friends, hair styles like new friends, switched clothes, become reluctant to talk about new friends, become very interested in rock music and concerts, become less interested in school, sports and academic hobbies, refused to talk about parents of new friends, started insisting on more privacy; demanded permission to stay out later than usual?

4. Is the child more difficult to communicate with?

Does the child: refuse to talk about details of friendship group activities, refuse to discuss "drug issues," become defensive when negative effects of drug use are discussed, strongly defend occasional use or experimental use of drugs by peers, insist that adults hassle their children, begin to defend "right" of youth, prefer to talk about bad habits of adults?

5. Is the child beginning to show physical and/or mental deterioration?

Does the child show: disordered thinking or ideas and thought patterns that seem out-of-order, heightened sensitivity to touch, smell and taste, increased appetite from marijuana smoking (known as the "munchies"), loss of ability to blush, decreased ability in rapid thought process, amotivational syndrome, weight loss?

Behavior changes as discussed in 1 through 5 may occur over a period of a few months, the summer, or over a year or more. These behavioral patterns should be monitored closely by the parent. More blatant, behavior will begin if the child can manipulate his way through the aforementioned examples and more obvious drug use behavior will begin to occur.

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6. Is the child's behavior becoming more intolerable to parent?

Does the child: demand his right to drink alcohol, refuse to spend additional time on studies even though grades are down, insist that teachers are unfair, become extremely irritable, refuse to do chores, use bad language, come home late with alcohol on breath, claim people are telling lies on him, claim never to have smoked pot, not want to eat with or spend time with family, act very secretive on telephone?

After behavioral clues to drug use, there usually comes the tell-tale physical evidence which is difficult to deny. The child will usually lie or give half-truths to parents when caught.

7. Is the child becoming careless in his drug use?

Does the child: forget to replace the liquor stolen from parents' cabinet, put the bottle between mattresses, leave the "roach" in flower pot, in bathroom or car ash-tray, forget who vomited in family car, insist that marijuana found in car or room belongs to someone else?

8. Is the child becoming drug dependent?

Does the child: take money from his parents, brothers or sisters, steal objects from home that are easily converted to cash, lie chronically, drop out of school?

Is the child: caught shoplifting, charged with burglary, charged with prostitution, arrested for drug use or delinquent act?

Does the child attempt suicide?

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