The Elephant in the Living Room: Talking to teens about drug and alcohol use.

WALDORF HIGH SCHOOL PARENT EDUCATION NIGHT

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Topics We Will Discuss

Why teens use drugs and alcohol

Social vs. Problematic use

Signs of Using

Strait Talk: Tips for getting the conversation going
Why teens use drugs and alcohol

Socializing:
Many teenagers use drugs and alcohol to overcome their insecurities, let their guard down and feel socially confident with others. Some see "partying" as a way to instantly bond with a group of kids, uniting with them in opposition to the "rules" of school, work — and parents.

Drugs provide an instant "in" with what may seem like a desirable social group
The kids who are using drugs or alcohol may seem like the "cool" ones to your teen, and using alongside them can provide an easy way to become part of this group.

Drugs make teens feel that they are really open and relating to each other
Kids have endless discussions on everything while high, and may come to believe that drugs are necessary to achieve that kind of close interaction.

Drugs give teens something to do
How many times have you heard your kids say "I'm bored?" Drugs give teenagers something to do, that often doesn't require transportation or too much money—just a quiet, uninterrupted place to hang out.
Why teens use drugs and alcohol

Transitions:

Periods of transition in teens' lives — like moving, divorce, puberty, changing schools, graduating — can often be a time of upheaval, leading many teens to attempt to find solace in alcohol or drugs.

**Teens with less-involved parents are more likely to use drugs**

The 6th annual Teens Today report reveals that high school teens whose parents pay the least attention to significant transition periods such as puberty or school changes are 42% more likely to engage in high-risk behaviors, including drinking, drug use, early sexual intercourse, and dangerous driving. Only 18% of teens whose parents pay the most attention involved themselves in such activities.

**Teens with involved parents are more mentally at ease**

Teens are more than twice as likely to report daily stress and appear to be twice as likely to report being depressed and bored when their parents are not involved with the changes going on in their lives. And research shows that stressed or depressed teens are more likely to turn to alcohol and drugs.
Why teens use drugs and alcohol

Emotional and Psychological Pain:

Some teens use alcohol or drugs to dull the pain in their lives. When they're given a chance to take something to make them temporarily feel better, many can't resist.

Teens drink or use drugs to check out from family problems or issues with school/grades
Poor grades may lead to family problems, and vice-versa, in an unfortunate cycle that leads many teens to turn to drugs or alcohol.

Loneliness, low self-esteem, depression, anxiety disorder and other mental health issues lead many teens to drugs
Furthermore, many of these issues occur in combinations, each compounding the intensity of the others.

Teens turn to drugs to deal with the pressures of everyday teen drama
Jealousy. Infighting. Gossip. These common features of teenage life can become too much for kids who haven't learned how to cope with difficult social situations.
Social vs. Problematic Use

Casual/Non-problematic Use
• recreational or other use that has negligible health or social impact

Beneficial Use
• use that has positive health or social impact
• e.g. medical psychopharmaceuticals; coffee to increase alertness; moderate consumption of red wine; sacramental use of ayahuasca or peyote

Problematic Use
• use that begins to have negative consequences for individual, friends/family, or society
• e.g. impaired driving; binge consumption; harmful routes of administration

Chronic Dependence
• use that has become habitual and compulsive despite negative health and social impacts
Signs that your teen may be moving from experimentation to problematic use

**Clue In to Behavioral Issues**

The signs of substance abuse aren't all physical. Be aware of these behavioral indicators that may be a sign that your teen has been drinking or is using drugs, especially if you've noticed an abrupt change in one of these behaviors.

- Change in relationships with family members or friends
- Loss of inhibitions
- Mood changes or emotional instability
- Loud, obnoxious behavior
- Laughing at nothing
- Unusually clumsy, stumbling, lack of coordination, poor balance
- Sullen, withdrawn, depressed
- Unusually tired
- Silent, uncommunicative
- Hostile, angry, uncooperative
- Deceitful or secretive
- Makes endless excuses
- Decreased Motivation
- Lethargic
- Unable to speak intelligibly, slurred speech, or rapid-fire speech
- Inability to focus
- Hyperactive
- Unusually elated
- Periods of sleeplessness or high energy, followed by long periods of "catch up" sleep

**A Closer Look**

**Unusually Tired**

Studies show that teenagers can't truly wind down until at least 11 pm—but usually must be up by 6 am for high school. In addition, most teens are too busy with homework, sports, and after-school clubs to get the 9 hours of sleep doctors recommend. So it's no surprise teens are perpetually tired. But if your teenager seems abnormally exhausted, it could be because he has a hangover or is using cocaine, amphetamines or prescription pain relievers, all which disrupt the normal sleep pattern.
Signs that your teen may be moving from experimentation to problematic use

Take Note of Home or Car Related Signs of Substance Abuse

If you've noticed items disappearing around the house, or found some unusual objects appearing, it's a good time to have a talk with your teenager about what you've noticed, and to start looking for other signs of teenage alcohol abuse or drug use.

Mood swings and changes in behavior are often a normal part of teenage development. But in some cases, these may be potential indicators of teenage alcohol abuse or possible drug abuse. If you suspect your teen may be using alcohol or drugs, here are some tell-tale signs you can watch for:

- Disappearance of prescription or over-the-counter pills
- Missing alcohol or cigarettes
- Disappearance of money or valuables
- Unusual smell in the car or bottles, pipes, or bongs on floor or in glove box
- Appearance of unusual containers, wrappers and drug apparatus, including pipes, rolling papers, small medicine bottles, eye drops, butane lighters or makeshift smoking devices, like bongs made out of toilet paper rolls and aluminum foil
- Hidden stashes of alcohol
- Appearance of unusual containers or wrappers, or seeds left on surfaces, like Frisbees, used to clean marijuana

Click a label to see related signs and symptoms of teenage alcohol use and/or drug use.

BEHAVIORAL ISSUES

PERSONAL APPEARANCE

PERSONAL HABITS

HOME OR CAR RELATED ISSUES

HEALTH ISSUES

SCHOOL OR WORK ISSUES
Signs that your teen may be moving from experimentation to problematic use

Pay Attention to School or Work-Related Issues

Notice how your teenager is doing at school, any sudden change in how she or he is doing homework — or what you're hearing from teachers or school administrators.

- Truancy or loss of interest in schoolwork
- Drop in grades
- Loss of interest in extracurricular activities, hobbies or sports
- Failure to fulfill responsibilities at school or work

Click a label to see related signs and symptoms of teenage alcohol use and/or drug use

A CLOSER LOOK
Truancy or loss of interest in schoolwork

As kids get older, many deem it “un–cool” to go to class or do their homework. A rebellious or attention-seeking child may cut class as a way of acting out. He also may start missing class or stop doing schoolwork because he has an undiagnosed learning disability, such as dyslexia or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), which makes him feel frustrated or dumb. But a child who is missing class frequently could be doing so in order to drink or do drugs during that time instead, and a loss of interest in school may be attributed to the lack of motivation that comes along with drug addiction.
Straight Talk:

Tips for Getting the Conversation Started
#1 – Be Direct and Calm

Approach your teen directly and immediately.

Avoid letting your anger and frustration and fear spill over into the conversation. If you approach them with panic, anger, aggression or accusations, you can be sure your teen will tell you absolutely nothing.

Approach your teen from a place of genuine concern for well-being, while reiterating your house rules about drug and alcohol use and the consequences that come with that behavior.
#2 – Ask open-ended questions

Approaching your teen with questions like:
“Can you tell me more about that?”
“How did you feel in that situation?”
“How can I help you with this?”

If your teen admits to using drugs or alcohol, ask questions about what kinds of drugs they have used, how often, and if they plan on using again.

You can also ask for their input on how to proceed.
#3 – Listen to Learn

Listen to what your teen is saying when they think you aren’t listening.

Make an effort to understand what is compelling them to use drugs or alcohol:

- Social Pressures
- Academic Stressors
- Self-medicating depression or anxiety

Using drugs and alcohol is a symptom of a larger problem. Understanding what that problem is will aid you in getting your teen the help he/she needs.
Within your own family, make sure that expectations and limits are CLEAR and COMMUNICATED.

Understand that the rules of your house DO NOT HAVE TO be the same as the next parent or the community.

Understand that rules can and should be AGE APPROPRIATE – you shouldn’t act 25 if you’re 15.

Educate yourselves – if they can learn about your phone and your computer faster than you, they can probably do the same with substances.
#5 – Get Treatment & Support

Take your teen to a qualified therapist who works with teens/young adults. When talking about professional help, don’t negotiate with your teen or take “no” for an answer. Teens rarely ask for help directly, but they do so with their behavior.

Learn more about substance abuse/addiction.

Talk to other parents.

Go to Al-Anon for support.

Don’t let your teen’s anger or threats dictate your decision making. Be the parent, not the friend.
Thank You