

How Can I Tell if My Child is Using Alcohol or Other Drugs?

This can sometimes be a difficult question to answer especially during early stages of alcohol or other drug use, when you may see little direct evidence your child is using.

Some signs of alcohol or other drug use can often be confused with normal adolescent behavior or other health problems. Other signs, however, are very strong indicators.

Although we urge you not to jump to conclusions or make your own diagnosis, each parent should be aware of the waning sign in their child's behavior.

Answer the following questions and they refer to the scoring guide that follows:

1. ___Yes___No

Does your child seem especially interested in drug- or alcohol-related slogans, posters, music or clothes? Does your child dress in a way that is associated with drug use?



2. ___Yes___No

Has your child lost interest in school, school activities or school athletics? Have grades dropped at all?

3. ___Yes___No

Has your child stopped spending time with old friends and is now spending time with kids that worry you? Is your child secretive or evasive about his/her friends, where they go and what they do?

4. ___Yes___No

Has your child lost interest in previously important hobbies, sports or other activities? Has your child lost motivation, enthusiasm and vitality?

5. ___Yes___No

Has your child seemed sick, fatigued or grumpy (possibly hung over?) in the morning after drug or alcohol use was possible the night before?

6. ___Yes___No

Has your child's relationship with your or other family members deteriorated? Is your child less interested in siblings or does he/she now verbally (or even physically) abuse them?

7. ___Yes___No

Have you suspected that money or other objects have been missing from around the house (money used for alcohol and drugs), or have you noticed that your child has more money than you would expect (from selling drugs)?

8. ___Yes___No

Do you now question your child's honesty? Do you feel you're not getting straight answers about what your child is doing, whom he/she is with or where he/she is spending time? (The lying may also be about matters that are seemingly unrelated to alcohol or drugs.)

9. ___Yes___No

Does your child get angry and defensive when you talk to him/her about alcohol and drugs or does your child refuse to discuss the topic at all? (People who are very defensive about alcohol and drugs are often hiding how much they use.)

10. ___Yes___No

Has your child been in contact with the law and have alcohol or drugs been involved in any way? (You can be pretty sure that if this has happened, there have been other times- maybe a lot-when he/she was drinking or using but wasn't caught.)



11. ___Yes___No

Are there physical signs of alcohol or drug use? Have you smelled alcohol on your child's breath, or the odor of marijuana on clothing in his/her room? Slurred speech, unclear thinking, swaggering gait, bloodshot eyes, dilated pupils and imprecise eye movement may also be clues.



12. ___Yes___No

Have you seen evidence of alcohol or drugs (a hidden beer bottle, beer can left in the car, marijuana seeds or cigarettes, rolling papers, drug paraphernalia, capsules or tablets)?

13. ___Yes___No

Has your child ever been caught with alcohol or drugs at school or school activities?

14. ___Yes___No

Has your child's physical appearance changed? Does he/she appear unhealthy, lethargic, seem to be more forgetful or have a shorter attention span than before?

15. ___Yes___No

Has your child's personality changed markedly? Does he/she change moods quickly, seem sullen, withdrawn from the family, display sudden anger or depression, or spend hours alone in his/her room?

How to Score the Questionnaire

This questionnaire is not a scientific instrument and is not meant to diagnose alcohol and other drug problems. It is meant to alert parents that problems may be present.

The questions are "red flag" detectors and may show a need for further action. Keep in mind that some of these questions can be answered "yes," yet simply reflect normal adolescent behavior.

"Yes" answers to questions directly relating to alcohol and drug use (10, 11, 12, 13) are, of course, cause for concern. "Yes" to any of these means you have a child using alcohol and/or other drugs, and you should take action.

Look for Patterns

In general, parents should look for an emerging pattern. “Yes” or “uncertain” to one or two answers should alert parents to suspect alcohol and drug use, monitor the child more closely, talk to knowledgeable sources and prepare to seek outside help.

If you answerd “yes” to three or more questions, help is probably needed. Your child may be in the experimental stages or may already be heavily involved in alcohol and drugs.

What About Tobacco?

Smoking (or chewing) is a concern for several reasons; it’s illegal, it’s addictive, it often leads to severe health problems and it may be a first step to other drug use. Finding tobacco products or noticing the smell of tobacco on your child are strong signs and warrant action.

Help Is Available

Remember, it is very difficult to handle this problem without the help of other experienced parents and /or professionals. This is not a problem that passes with time. It may well be a life and death matter.

If you are concerned, take action by calling LCAD at 475-2694. We have access to local and national resources that will be of assistance to you. You can also visit our website at www.lcad.org and go to the links page.



This brochure was produced by the Lincoln Council on Alcoholism & Drugs. For more information, contact:

**Lincoln
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Is My Child Using?

