

SUFFOLK COALITION TO PREVENT ALCOHOL AND DRUG DEPENDENCIES, INC.
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"HOW CAN I TELL IF MY CHILD IS USING DRUGS?"

"HOW CAN I TELL IF MY CHILD IS USING DRUGS?" is one of the questions increasingly asked by parents. Although it is sometimes difficult to separate some typical adolescent behaviors from drug-induced behaviors, parents should consider the following behavior suspect:

1. Does the child seem to be changing? Is the child becoming irritable, less affectionate, secretive, unpredictable, hostile, depressed, uncooperative, apathetic, withdrawn, sullen, easily provoked, oversensitive?
2. Is the child becoming less responsible? Is the child not doing usual chores, late coming home, tardy at school, forgetful of family occasions (birthdays and the like), not completing homework or routine school obligations?
3. Is the child changing friends, dress code or interests? Has the child a new groups of friends, the language of new friends, hairstyles like new friends, switched clothing styles, become reluctant to talk about new friends or parents of new friends, become less interested in school, sports, started insisting on much more privacy, demanding 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 friendships or group activities, refuse to discuss "drug issues," strongly defend occasional or experimental use of drugs by peers, defend the "rights" of youth, especially in relation to risk behaviors?
5. Is the child beginning to show physical and/or mental deterioration? Does the child exhibit disordered thinking, heightened sensitivity to touch, smell, and taste, unusual increased appetite, loss of the ability to blush, decreased speed in thought processes, a motivational syndrome, weight loss?

MORE OBVIOUS DRUG USE BEHAVIOR USUALLY FOLLOWS

1. Is the child's behavior becoming more intolerable to parents? Does the child become extremely irritable, withdrawn, use foul language, refuse to do any chores, insist that teachers are always unfair, act very secretively on the telephone, not want to eat or spend time with the family.
2. After behavioral clues to drug use, there usually comes tell-tale physical evidence which is difficult to deny. The child will usually lie or give half-truths to parents when caught.
3. Is the child becoming careless in his drug use? Does the child forget to replace liquor stolen from parent's cabinet, put the bottle between mattresses, leave the "roach" in the flowerpot, bathroom or car ashtray, insist that marijuana found in the car or room belongs to someone else?

4. Is the child becoming drug dependent? Does the child take money from his parents and siblings, steal objects from home that are easily converted to cash, lie chronically, drop out of school or indicate a desire to do so?

"WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I SUSPECT MY CHILD IS USING DRUGS?"

1. Stay calm. Keep the lines of communication open. Avoid discussions while your child is still under the influence of a drug or when you are too angry to be calm.
2. Educate yourself. Be alert for signs of drug use.
3. Make it clear that you will not allow your child to use drugs. Be equally clear that you are doing this because you love your son or daughter. Back up your rule against drugs with clear, consistent rules of behavior. If your child violates these, it is time to back up those rules with discipline. Unless you are prepared to enforce them, these rules will become meaningless. Remember, you as a parent have not only the right, but the responsibility, to set limits on your child' s behavior.
4. Try to be understanding and supportive. Avoid being sarcastic, accusatory, stigmatizing, self-blaming.
5. If discipline and talking it out fail, seek professional help!