

# ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

If you do have serious concerns, seek professional help. There is no shame in asking for information and a number of agencies are there to help.

## Why Teenagers try alcohol and Drugs:

This is a time when teenagers are experimenting and trying out all kinds of new experiences. Experimentation helps them to develop a greater sense of themselves as independent individuals in the world. It might be because there's a strong urge to become part of 'the group', it might also help them to deal with emotional problems or, it could be a combination of reasons e.g. curiosity, boredom, attempting to deal with some traumatic or upsetting memories or through following the example of friends or family.

There are typical warning signs e.g. mood swings, red eyes, sleep disturbances and bad skin. These however are also typical of adolescence. The only sure sign is physical evidence such as bottles of alcohol or packets of drugs. If your teenager is spending a great deal of money without anything obvious to show for it, starting to steal money or to sell their own or others' property, you may pay to be suspicious.

## What should I do if I think my teenager could have a problem?

- Don't panic!
- Don't come on strong and accuse
- Before broaching the subject, choose your moment carefully
- Avoid accusations and criticisms
- Ask about both the good and not so good things about alcohol and drugs
- If useful, ask if they would like information on the effects of using alcohol and drugs
- Above all, try to keep the lines of communication open
- Make sure you are informed
- Think through the issues for yourself first
- Model and coach the behaviours you want
- Talk with your teenager

## What to do if they deny It's a Problem?

Once again, don't panic, get angry or resort to lectures or threats! Show your teenager that you only want to help her or him and that you are always prepared to listen or engage in discussion. Most communities have a number of different agencies which provide services to families experiencing problems with drug or alcohol abuse. Contact your local Citizens Advice Bureau or hospital. It can also be useful to see a Counsellor specialising in these problems, especially if your teenager will agree to join you. Get to know your teenager's friends and parents. Remember that parents have rights too, that is, the right to not have alcohol/and or drugs in your house if you choose. Let your kids know there is a bottom line and that they are expected to respect it. Otherwise, there are consequences which could involve an earlier curfew, reduced phone privileges or 'grounding'.

## Different Kinds of Drugs:

### Alcohol:

Alcohol is absorbed directly into the bloodstream from the stomach and intestines, so its effects can be experienced relatively quickly. How much an individual is affected depends on a range of factors.

### Cannabis:

Cannabis is a depressant and is manufactured in a number of different forms, the most common being marijuana, hash and hash oil. The immediate effects of cannabis will vary according to dose, body size, psychological state of an individual, the form of cannabis being used, the concentration of THC (the primary active ingredient).

### Inhalants:

Substances in this category include petrol, solvents, deodorants, insect sprays, paint, glue, lighter fluid and other forms of gas. The long-term effects of inhalant use are very serious and include damage to the brain, damage to the respiratory system, decreased attention, decreased ability to learn, decreased co-ordination and violent and unpredictable behaviour. Death can also result.

### Amphetamines:

Amphetamines are a collection of drugs commonly known as 'speed'. They are usually bought in the form of yellow or white powder, or sometimes a liquid. Immediate effects include an increase in confidence, energy and alertness, hyperactivity, talkativeness and an ability to stay awake all night. A person can also feel anxious, irritable, paranoid and very panicky, hostile, aggressive and a few may experience marked mental disturbances. Death can also result.

### Ecstasy:

Ecstasy is a stimulant and is similar to amphetamines and hallucinogens and is usually sold as small white or yellow tablets that are swallowed. The immediate effects include sensations of floating, intense confidence, well-being and closeness to others. Higher doses can cause hallucinations. Other effects include dehydration, nausea, increased blood pressure, anxiety and paranoia.

