

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DRUG USE

It is important to keep in mind that if a child shows any of the following symptoms, it does not necessarily mean that he or she is using drugs. The presence of some of these behaviors could be the product of adolescent stress. Others may be symptoms of depression or a host of other problems. Whatever the cause, they may warrant attention, especially if they persist or if they occur in a cluster. A mental health professional or a caring and concerned adult may help a youngster successfully overcome a crisis and develop more effective coping skills, often preventing further problems.

The key is change; it is important to watch for any significant changes in your child's physical appearance, personality, attitude or behavior.

Physical Signs

Loss of appetite, increase in appetite, any changes in eating habits, unexplained weight loss or gain.

Slowed or staggering walk; poor physical coordination.

Inability to sleep, awake at unusual times, unusual laziness.

Red, watery eyes; pupils larger or smaller than usual; blank stare.

Cold, sweaty palms; shaking hands.

Puffy face, blushing or paleness.

Smell of substance on breath, body or clothes.

Extreme hyperactivity; excessive talkativeness.

Runny nose; hacking cough.

Needle marks on lower arm, leg or bottom of feet.

Nausea, vomiting or excessive sweating.

Tremors or shakes of hands, feet or head.

Irregular heartbeat.

Behavioral Signs

Change in overall attitude/personality with no other identifiable cause.

Changes in friends; new hang-outs; sudden avoidance of old crowd; doesn't want to talk about new friends; friends are known drug users.

Change in activities or hobbies.

Drop in grades at school or performance at work; skips school or is late for school.

Change in habits at home; loss of interest in family and family activities.

Difficulty in paying attention; forgetfulness.

General lack of motivation, energy, self-esteem, "I don't care" attitude.

Sudden oversensitivity, temper tantrums, or resentful behavior.

Moodiness, irritability, or nervousness.

Silliness or giddiness.

Paranoia

Excessive need for privacy; unreachable.

Secretive or suspicious behavior.

Car accidents.

Chronic dishonesty.

Unexplained need for money, stealing money or items.

Change in personal grooming habits.

Possession of drug paraphernalia.

Drug Specific Symptoms:

Marijuana: Glassy, red eyes; loud talking and inappropriate laughter followed by sleepiness; a sweet burnt scent; loss of interest, motivation; weight gain or loss.

Alcohol: Clumsiness; difficulty walking; slurred speech; sleepiness; poor judgment; dilated pupils; possession of a false ID card.

Depressants: (including barbiturates and tranquilizers) Seems drunk as if from alcohol but without the associated odor of alcohol; difficulty concentrating; clumsiness; poor judgment; slurred speech; sleepiness; and contracted pupils.

Stimulants: Hyperactivity; euphoria; irritability; anxiety; excessive talking followed by depression or excessive sleeping at odd times; may go long periods of time without eating or sleeping; dilated pupils; weight loss; dry mouth and nose.

Inhalants: (Glues, aerosols, and vapors) Watery eyes; impaired vision, memory and thought; secretions from the nose or rashes around the nose and mouth; headaches and nausea; appearance of intoxication; drowsiness; poor muscle control; changes in appetite; anxiety; irritability; an unusual number of spray cans in the trash.

Hallucinogens: Dilated pupils; bizarre and irrational behavior including paranoia, aggression, hallucinations; mood swings; detachment from people; absorption with self or other objects, slurred speech; confusion.

Heroin: Needle marks; sleeping at unusual times; sweating; vomiting; coughing and sniffing; twitching; loss of appetite; contracted pupils; no response of pupils to light.

Tobacco/Nicotine: Smell of tobacco; stained fingers or teeth.