

# How do I know if my teen is using drugs?

*It's hard to believe that your child could be using alcohol or other drugs. Many teens experiment with drugs, and you need to know how to recognize the signs that they may be experiencing problems.*

## What are the signs?

Remember, you know your kids. You do not need to be an expert to detect drug use. Trust yourself to know when there is a problem. When they were babies you could tell when they were sick because they weren't acting themselves. In the same way, you will notice when your teen's behaviour changes, and such changes could be the sign of drug use. Keep in mind that these changes could be due to other reasons and there isn't a single sign that only points to drug use.

Possible changes to watch for include changes in

- school performance
- attitudes toward sports and other activities
- weight or physical appearance
- eating or sleeping habits
- mood swings
- withdrawing from family
- friends
- behaviour

## What should I do?

If you notice changes in your child's behaviour, friends and/or mood, talk to them. Tell them you are concerned and explain why. If you suspect that your child is using alcohol or other drugs, you may feel that you need to catch them using. Perhaps you feel that you should search their room or control their activities and friends. These are normal feelings. After all, you want them to be safe.

It is much more helpful to talk with your child about the changes you have observed. Tell them the differences you see between the way they used to behave and the way they behave now. Try not to judge them. Stay focused on their behaviour. For example, saying "You used to be considerate!" may seem like a personal attack. If you concentrate on the behaviour you are observing, you will be less likely to hurt or offend them. For example, "You used to call when you were going to be late and you don't anymore. Would you be willing to do that again?"

It is possible that there is another cause for their behaviour. Some medical conditions can appear as drug use and it is important to involve your family doctor as well in determining the best next steps. If drug use ends up being the problem, help is available. And remember, you can see a counsellor to help you find new ways of reaching your teen.

For more information, contact your local AADAC office or call the AADAC Help Line at 1-866-33AADAC. We are available to give you information and support.

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