

# Warning signs of Teenage Alcohol or Drug abuse



## When do you know your child is suffering from an addiction?

About the time my son entered middle school, I thought to myself, “Stay aware—this is the time when many kids start using drugs.”

I talked to him about it, but he assured me that he would never use them. As I watched him struggle with puberty and all the other normal changes that occur at that age, I noticed he was confused and sad and sometimes downright belligerent. I talked to him again and he assured me everything was okay. Soon,

he started wearing different clothing and had a “funky” hair style. When I asked him about it, he said all his friends dressed this way. When the anger arose, I would ask him about it and he would shout at me and say, “You don’t understand.”

He was right, I didn’t understand, but this is just the way teenagers are, right? “Rebellious and testing authority,” I thought to myself. By the time he got to high school, he was a completely different person. I don’t know why I was so shocked when I got a call from the school counselor asking me to come in for a meeting to discuss my son’s drug problem.

Looking back, I couldn’t believe I missed so many warning signs. My son’s addiction happened right before my eyes and I didn’t even see it. Maybe I was too frightened to see it.

Raising a teenager is no easy task. I tried to be “different” from my parents who over reacted to every change I went through. In retrospect, maybe it was their overreaction that kept me safe and responsible.



Fortunately, a counselor had intervened and my whole family was able to get the help we needed.

My son attended an outpatient program for teens that included family counseling to help us improve our communication. It’s still not so easy living with teenagers (our daughter just turned 13), but now we all have better coping skills and my husband and I know the importance of staying vigilant.

My story is not uncommon for families raising teens. Sometimes the stress of all the changes teens experience once they leave the safety of the single classroom environment of elementary school is more than some can take. When they arrive at middle school, they seek opportunities to relieve that stress. In the absence of more healthy coping skills, some teens turn to pot or alcohol. And since teens also form groups of others like themselves, these teens also find a peer group where drug use is fun and that makes them feel accepted, so it escalates.

In my son’s case, by the time he left middle school, he was already using marijuana and prescription drugs.

# So, do you know the Warning Signs of Teenage Alcohol or Drug abuse

It's difficult to know if your teen is using drugs or alcohol because changes in mood or attitudes, unusual temper outbursts, changes in sleeping habits and changes in hobbies or other interests are common in teens. But if you're asking yourself if it might be happening, look closer, because it just might be. It also helps to talk to the teen's doctor and/or school counselors. According to the "Parents the Anti-Drug" website, parents should look for signs of depression, withdrawal, carelessness with grooming or hostility. Also ask yourself, is your child doing well in school, getting along with friends, taking part in sports or other healthy activities. The website also provides the following:



•Changes in friends  
•Negative changes in schoolwork, missing school, or declining grades  
•Increased secrecy about possessions or activities  
•Use of incense, room deodorant, or perfume to hide smoke or chemical odors  
•Subtle changes in conversations with friends, e.g. more secretive, using "coded" language  
•Change in clothing choices: new fascination with clothes that highlight drug use  
•Increase in borrowing money

## Watch list for Parents

- Changes in friends
- Negative changes in schoolwork, missing school, or declining grades
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- Evidence of drug paraphernalia such as pipes, rolling papers, etc.
- Evidence of use of inhalant products (such as hairspray, nail polish, correction fluid, common household products); Rags and paper bags are sometimes used as accessories
- Bottles of eye drops, which may be used to mask bloodshot eyes or dilated pupils
- New use of mouthwash or breath mints to cover up the smell of alcohol
- Missing prescription drugs—especially narcotics and mood stabilizers

## Help is available

For more information go to [www.theantidrug.com](http://www.theantidrug.com) or call the County of San Diego Access and Crisis Line at:

**1 800 479 3339**

to talk to a counselor who can refer you to an appropriate program. Trained counselors are available to assist 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.



County of San Diego Health and Human Services Alcohol and Drugs Agency funds a variety of free and low-cost services for teens and their families.

*This article was made to promote community education and awareness.*