

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

### OTHER TITLES

#### Create It

*Teaching your children to talk about their feelings*

*How can I help my young child learn to get along with others?*

*If you're a parent, you're a role model: How to teach your children by example*

#### Nurture It

*How can I teach my young child to deal with peer pressure?*

*Teaching your children the truth about drugs and gambling*

*How can I help my young child to be more confident?*

*How to listen actively to your children*

#### Choose It

*How can I help my child if my partner is addicted?*

*Helping your teen work through anger*

*The truth about popular drugs*

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

*How do I talk to my teenager about drugs?*

*Raves and club drugs: How do I protect my kids?*

#### Get It Back

*Helping teens evaluate their drug use*

*How bad is my teen's drinking or drug use?*

*Does your teen's drug use leave you feeling like you're losing your sanity?*

*How to get through to your teen*

*Intervening when your teen is using drugs*

*Getting help for your son or daughter who is drinking, using other drugs or gambling*

*Supporting your son or daughter in recovery*

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. You already know more than you think you know. Remember that you know your child better than anyone else.

It can be hard to talk about this issue with teens. If they are not using drugs, they may feel like they are being accused, even if that is not your intention. If they are using, they may not be willing to talk about what is happening in their lives. You may end up arguing with your teens. But don't give up! If you make the effort to discuss difficult topics with your teens, they will know you care. And if they feel that the lines of communication are open, they will be more likely to turn to you when they are having problems with things like relationships, school, stress or drugs.

### There is no single reason teens use drugs

For many people, alcohol and other drug use is regarded as a common and acceptable part of everyday life, even though it is dangerous for some. And adolescence is a time when teens are curious and willing to take risks, even risks related to drug use.

Different factors may put a teen at risk of using, such as stress, learning disabilities, physical abuse, mental or sexual abuse, depression, peer pressure, a desire to fit in with other kids, a desire to try adult behaviour, or low self-esteem. These factors don't "cause" kids to use alcohol or other drugs, though, and many kids are able to deal with tough situations without using substances. But the chance that kids may turn to alcohol or other drugs increases if they are having some of the problems listed above. If they are experiencing stress, alcohol or other drugs may lead them to believe they have control of their feelings. Using can also make them feel that they are escaping reality.

### 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. How do you know when they're sick? What's the number one sign? That they are not acting like themselves. Use these same skills to detect alcohol or other drug use.

Keep in mind that these changes could be due to other reasons. No one sign alone indicates drug use. Look for patterns or combinations of indicators.

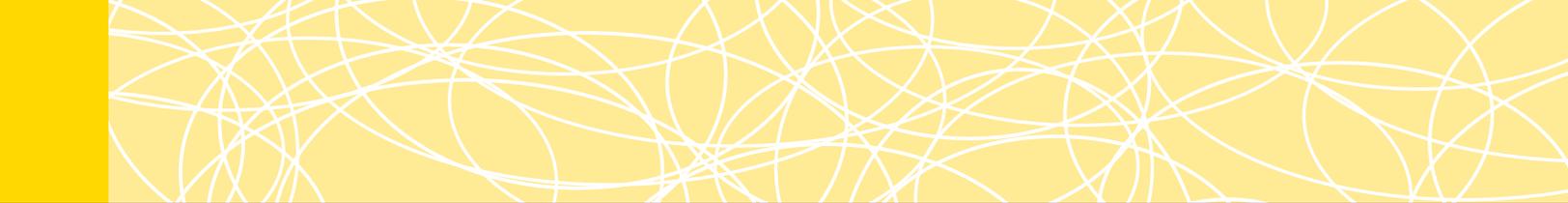
Possible changes to watch for include

- changes in school performance
- changes in attitudes toward sports and other activities
- changes in weight or physical appearance
- changes in eating or sleeping habits
- changes in friends
- changes in behaviour

### What should I do?

If you suspect that your children are 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 children 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?”

### **Now what?**

If you see a pattern of changes in your children, talk to them. Tell them you are concerned and explain why. It is possible that there is another cause for their behaviour. If drug use ends up being the problem, help is available. And remember, you can see a counsellor yourself to help you find new ways of reaching your teens.

### **For more information**

We understand that everyone’s needs are different. Whether you want to prevent your child from using alcohol, tobacco or other drugs, or you want to help your child deal with a drug problem, we can help. Information and prevention programs, group and family counselling, outpatient and residential treatment, and the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs program are offered by Alberta Health Services and its funded services to help your child and your family.

For more information and to find an addiction services office near you, please call the 24-hour Helpline at 1-866-332-2322.



## Activity Page

### 1. Cycle of dependency

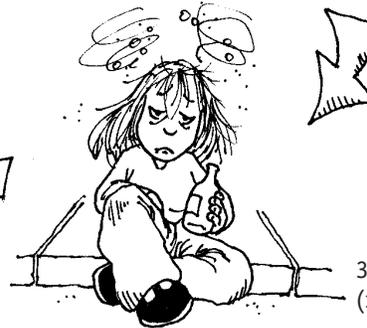
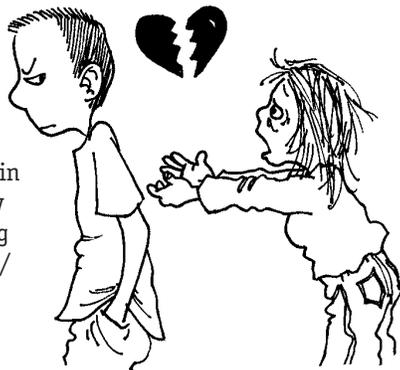
1. Difficulty in managing experiences/emotions—use drug—quick, easy effects (short time)



2. Increase time using drug—decrease time using skills to manage—skills erode (not used)



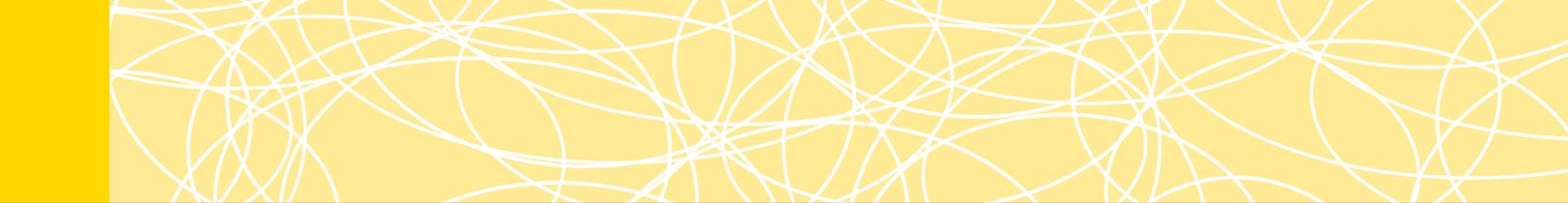
4. Back again to difficulty in managing experiences/emotions



3. Skills erode (not used)

### Discussion questions

- Does this seem like a realistic representation of how alcohol or other drug use might start?
  - What do you think will happen when someone gets into this cycle?
  - How do you think a person could get out of this cycle?
  - Have you known someone who has been in this situation with alcohol or other drugs?
- Ask your teen to tell you how they would know if one of their friends was using alcohol or other drugs.
  - If you seem to be going through a difficult time with your teen, make a list of all the things that you like about them. Reframing a tough situation in a different light can help you both keep perspective. Remember to discuss the list with your child.
  - Think about your teen when they were little. What did they respond to and how could you incorporate this now?
  - If you find yourself in a situation where you think your teen may be using drugs, it can be very scary and overwhelming. This is the time to gather information and make a decision for action that is right for you.
  - Remember to breathe! Take time to look at your options.



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