

Substance Use



notMYkid[®]

Educate • Inspire • Grow

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SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DRUG OR ALCOHOL USE



During the preteen and teen years, it can sometimes be difficult to know whether your child is dealing with a mental or behavioral health challenge such as substance use, depression, or bullying, or if the changes in behavior you're seeing are simply a matter of your child going through a natural transition. However, it's important to begin

a conversation to find out what is going on in order to know how to best help your child. It's especially important to take note if several symptoms are occurring in combination, or are occurring over a prolonged period of time. Even if they're not dealing with a serious issue, taking the time to talk with them can still be incredibly beneficial.

Some of the most common signs and symptom of drug or alcohol use by youth can include:

- A drop in grades
- Decline in athletic performance
- Isolation from family and friends
- Mood swings
- Dishonesty
- Change in peer groups
- Drawing or writing drug-related symbols and/or slang
- Parental defiance
- Slurred speech
- Extremely dilated or constricted pupils
- Red, watery, or glassy eyes
- Frequent use of eye drops to hide red eyes
- Violating curfew, coming home late, unable to explain whereabouts
- Rejection of parental values
- Finding drug [paraphernalia or concealment devices](#) in your child's backpack, purse, room, or vehicle
- Disappearance of your money or possessions
- Defiance about drug use
- Antisocial behavior
- Loss of interest in previous hobbies and activities
- Changes in sleeping habits
- Changes in eating habits
- Finding multiple empty boxes of over the counter medication such as cough medicine
- Smell of alcohol on the breath or coming from the skin
- Prescription drugs missing from your medicine cabinet or prescription bottles

Substances that cause constricted pupils:

Opioids such as hydrocodone, oxycodone, fentanyl, morphine, heroin, methadone, codeine

Substances that cause dilated pupils:

Amphetamines, methamphetamines, cocaine, crack cocaine, hallucinogens (LSD, psilocybin mushrooms), marijuana, MDMA/Molly/Ecstasy

Substances that cause red eyes:

Marijuana, cocaine, crack cocaine, benzodiazepines (Xanax, Klonopin, Ativan, Valium), alcohol, prescription sedatives



SUBSTANCES COMMONLY USED BY YOUTH



This combination of accessibility and low perception of risk makes it a very popular choice for adolescents, making it the substance that many kids will try first.

Alcohol

Due to the fact that alcohol is legal and therefore in many homes, it is readily available and more easily accessed by adolescents. Because of the fact that it is societally accepted and viewed very differently than many illegal drugs, many adolescents have a very low perception of risk related to alcohol. This combination of accessibility and low perception of risk makes it a very popular choice for adolescents, making it the substance that many kids will try first.

The dangers involved with alcohol use by youth include binge drinking, alcohol poisoning, impaired decision making, more risk taking behavior, and interference with brain development.

Signs and symptoms of use: see our [“Signs and Symptoms of Drug or Alcohol Use”](#) page.

Nicotine

For years, nicotine has commonly been one of the first drugs used by adolescents. However, years ago, teens were typically using nicotine in the form of tobacco. In more recent years, cigarettes have been replaced by E-cigarettes and vapes. As with alcohol, nicotine in the form of E-cigarettes and vapes is easily accessed by teens. Some are able to have older students purchase for them, and one study found that kids are successful buying E-cigarettes online 94% of the time. Also like alcohol, many adolescents have a low perception of risk related to E-cigarettes and vaping.

In more recent years, cigarettes have been replaced by E-cigarettes and vapes.

The dangers involved with nicotine use by youth include addiction, interference with brain development, and problems with memory, attention, and learning.

More detailed information is available on our page [Vaping and E-Cigarettes: What Parents Should Know](#).





In more recent years, THC use is more commonly taking the form of vaped THC concentrates called dabs, wax, shatter, BHO (butane hash oil), etc.

Marijuana/THC (dabs, wax, BHO, etc.)

Like alcohol and nicotine, marijuana is also a substance that has long been popular with adolescents and among the substances most commonly used first by youth. However, just as the method of use for nicotine has changed, so has the method of use for THC (Tetrahydrocannabinol), one of the many active ingredients in marijuana, but the one most responsible for the “high” sought out by kids. Years ago, parents would be looking for buds like the one you see above. In more recent years, THC use is more commonly taking the form of vaped THC concentrates called dabs, wax, shatter, BHO (butane hash oil), etc. The example of a wax/dab pen and dabs below are what parents are more likely to run across now.

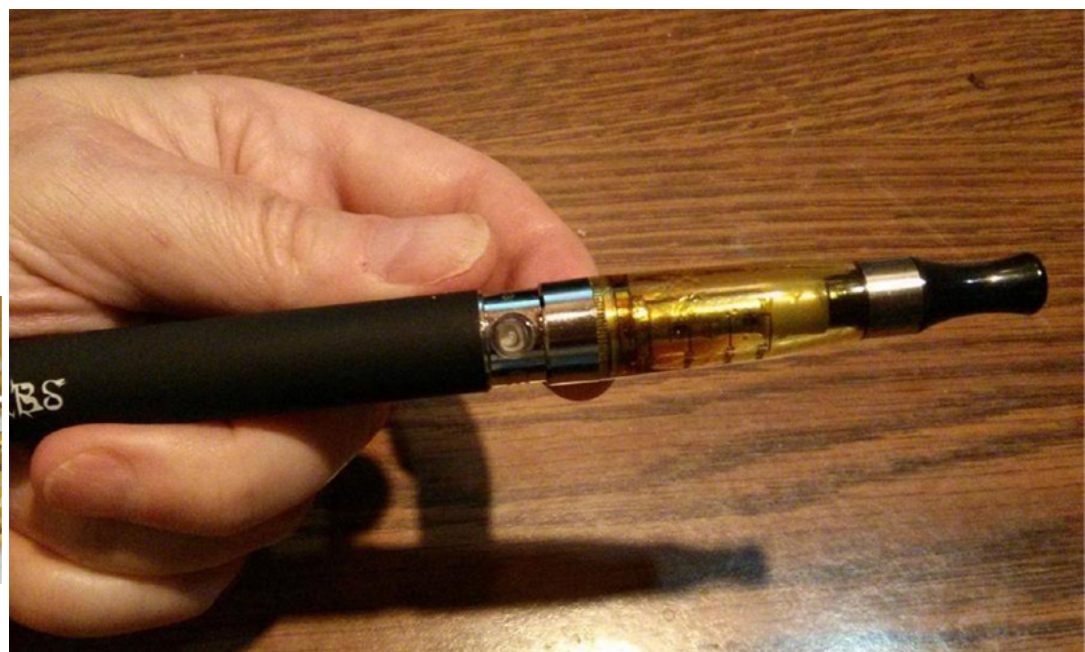
In recent years, as teens’ perception of risk related to THC has decreased, use has increased. In fact, while teen use of a number of other substances has lessened recently, use of THC by youth has continued to climb. Many adolescents falsely believe that use of THC is harmless, or even beneficial. When it comes to use by youth, there are consequences however.

The dangers involved with use by youth include interference with brain development, decreased motivation, decreased academic performance, and problems with memory, attention, and learning.

Signs and symptoms of use: see our [“Signs and Symptoms of Drug or Alcohol Use”](#) page.



Wax/Dab Pen



Shatter/Wax

Like some of the other substances on this list, the common misuse of prescription drugs by youth owes a lot to availability and low perception of risk.



Prescription Drugs (opioid painkillers, stimulants, sedatives, etc.)

A “Monitoring The Future” study by NIDA (the National Institute on Drug Abuse) found that after alcohol, nicotine, and THC, 12th graders in the U.S. were most commonly moving to misusing prescription drugs. In misusing them, they’re taking prescription drugs they’ve not been prescribed by a doctor, or they’re taking them in too large of quantities or too frequently. Like some of the other substances on this list, the common misuse of prescription drugs by youth owes a lot to availability and low perception of risk.

Many households have prescription drugs that have potential for misuse by youth. These drugs are commonly prescribed and are often not

secured in the home. This accessibility leads to more common use by youth. And once again, low perception of risk is involved. When it comes to prescription drugs, many youth note the fact that a doctor prescribes them, they’re made in regulated conditions, a pharmacy dispenses them, and productive members of society take them. This combination causes adolescents to view them as much safer than street drugs. However, when they are misused, they can be as deadly as any street drug.

The dangers involved with use by youth include overdose (including fatal overdoses), addiction, serious withdrawal symptoms, and the potential for youth to combine prescription drugs with other prescription drugs or with alcohol. That combination is incredibly dangerous and can lead to fatalities. One study cited by the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission (ACJC) indicated that more than 1/3 of youth misusing prescription drugs in Arizona were creating such a combination.

More detailed information is available on our blog entry [“Opioid Misuse: The Epidemic Within a Pandemic.”](#)



TALKING WITH YOUTH ABOUT DRUGS AND ALCOHOL



Start Early

The average age that kids begin using drugs and/or alcohol in the United States is 12 years old. In order to be preventative, it's important to start talking with your kids before the age of 12. You may be surprised by what a 10, 9, or even 8-year-old has already heard about drugs and alcohol at school, from their peers, on social

media, or from pop culture. It's possible to lay the foundation even earlier by having conversations with very young children about making healthy choices and taking care of their bodies. You can build on that foundation as they get older, being more direct about drugs and alcohol in age-appropriate ways.



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Ask Questions

Ask your kids what they've already heard or seen about drugs and alcohol. Ask them what they

already know. Inquire about what they've heard mentioned at school or on social media.

Listen

Let them speak without interrupting or overreacting. You may hear something that surprises you, but it's important to maintain

your composure or you risk your child feeling uncomfortable opening up to you. Acknowledge them for their honesty.

Seize The Moment

Take advantage of any opportunity to talk with your kids. Regular family dinners are a great way to have more in-depth conversations, but sometimes your opportunity may come during a car ride. If there has been a local or national

incident involving drugs or alcohol (a celebrity overdose, a student arrested at school for drugs, etc.), that's an organic window for you to begin a conversation by asking your kids their thoughts on the incident.

Be Clear

Be direct with your kids regarding your stance on alcohol and drugs. Let them know the rules as well as the consequences for breaking those rules. As parents we sometimes assume our kids

know our thoughts and feelings on certain things, but it's better to take the time to be clear with them and to offer to answer any questions they might have about our stance.

Do Your Research

Read studies, research, and articles on a substance before you talk with your kids about it. Understand the confirmed dangers, especially for kids, so you can emphasize why it's important that they not use. A brief internet search can

provide you with a wealth of information backed up by science and medicine. If they ask you a question you don't know the answer to, offer to look it up with them.

Practice Saying No

Don't let your kids wait until they're offered drugs or alcohol to decide how they're going to say no. Without preparation, practice, and forethought, they're more likely to give in to temptation or peer pressure. Help them figure out a reason for saying no that feels genuine to them. The reason will vary from one person to the next. Some kids say no because they don't want to affect their

sports performance or risk getting kicked off a team. Other kids mention that they don't want to get in trouble with their parents, or cite the fact that their parents implement home drug testing. Whatever the reason is, have your kid practice using the words with you so that the phrases feel comfortable to them. Refine and adjust the reason and phrasing as needed.

Offer a Way Out

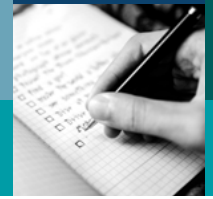
Agree on a code word or phrase that your kids can text you to indicate that they need to be picked up and removed from a potentially dangerous situation. This will allow them a way out of a situation such as a party where drug use is occurring or will keep them from getting in a vehicle with someone behind the wheel who is

under the influence. When you receive the code word or phrase, call their phone to find out where they are so you can pick them up. In order to save face with peers they can use the excuse that there has been a family emergency or that you need to come get them for another reason.



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CREATE A FAMILY SUBSTANCE USE PREVENTION PLAN



Use these guidelines to create your family's plan. Customize, modify, or edit the suggestions to meet your family's needs, principles, values, and living situation.

Be Consistent

- Discuss boundaries, rules, and consequences with your spouse or partner regarding drug and alcohol use by your child, and come to an agreement before presenting the plan to your child.
- Make sure all adults involved in raising the child are on the same page, unified, and sharing a consistent message on drug and alcohol use
- Be clear, concise, and consistent with your rules, and explain them clearly to your child long before they are likely to encounter the temptation to use alcohol or drugs.
- Model the behavior you want to see in your child. As parents, our actions speak louder than our words.

Communicate

- Be intentional about talking with your child regarding drugs and alcohol. Create regular opportunities for a two-way dialogue. They are likely to encounter temptation and pressure to use drugs or alcohol multiple times, therefore your conversation on the topic shouldn't just be a one-time talk.
- Share real-life examples of drug and alcohol use and their consequences. If someone the child knows has suffered consequences due to drugs and alcohol, that experience makes it more real to them as opposed to simply being a general warning.
- If the genetics of alcoholism and addiction run in your family, let your child know that they may be at greater risk to struggle with alcoholism or addiction if they choose to drink or use, especially prior to adulthood.
- Listen more than you speak. Let them express their thoughts, feelings, opinions, and experiences. If they feel they are genuinely being heard, they will feel more comfortable opening up to you.
- Role play scenarios with your child to allow them to practice their reason for saying "no" when they are offered drugs or alcohol.
- Eat a meal as a family consistently at least five days a week. Research has shown that [regular family dinners](#) without electronic distractions can make youth less likely to use drugs or alcohol. If family meals are not possible, set aside other regular time weekly to engage in an activity together that lends itself to open conversation and active listening.
- Answer your child's questions honestly at an age-appropriate level
- Share personal/family use history with honesty but in a safe and controlled manner and without glamorizing past use.



Promote Healthy Behaviors and Self-Care

- Teach your child strategies to handle stress in a positive manner
- Encourage your child to engage in healthy behaviors such as music, writing, art, sports, exercise, faith, helping others, etc.
- Support them in the activities that they enjoy
- [Read notMYkid's blog entry on helping stressed teens](#)
- Ensure that your child is getting sufficient sleep, exercise, nutrition, and time outdoors.
- Maintain healthy limits on electronic use or "screen time" by your child

Educate Yourself

- Research online. Learn to recognize [commonly used drugs](#) as well as [drug paraphernalia and concealment devices](#).
- Be able to recognize the [signs and symptoms of drug or alcohol use](#).
- Learn current terminology, slang, and symbols related to drugs.
- Become a knowledgeable and credible resource for your child through educating yourself.

Deter

- Lock up and monitor alcohol, prescription drugs, and over the counter medications in your home.
- Properly dispose of unused prescription medication. (info available under "Safe Medicine Disposal Locators" section [here](#))
- Be aware of household items that could be used to get high: OTC medications, gasoline, spray paint, keyboard duster, some types of glue, etc. Restrict your child's access to those items.
- Create an environment where your kids and their friends feel comfortable, but not a place where they are able to drink or use.

Monitor

- Get to know your child's friends, and their friends' siblings, parents, and families.
- Be conscious of your child's technology use and what they're reading, posting, and encountering on their phones and tablets.
- Get familiar with the apps and websites your teen uses.
- Consider the use of parental control and monitoring software such as [Bark](#). (Use code NOTMYKID for 30 days free)
- Check your child's room, vehicle, or backpack on a regular basis
- Discuss your boundaries around drugs and alcohol with the adults/parents your child interacts with.



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Educate Your Community

- Educate your friends, family members, and other parents on strategies related to preventing youth substance use
- Elicit the support of family, friends, coaches, religious leaders, community members, etc. to help prevent youth substance use
- Encourage members of your community to create their own substance use prevention plans as well



Verify

- Consider using [home drug testing](#) as a way to prevent or intervene in your child's substance use. Knowing they'll be tested by their parents can deter many youth from using drugs, and also offers them an out when offered drugs by their peers. If you do get a positive test, it provides
- clarity on exactly what substance your child is using, and therefore what they need help with.
- Verify that your child is adhering to your other rules and guidelines related to curfew, whereabouts, grades, online behavior, etc.

Get Connected

- If you discover that your child has been using drugs or alcohol, get connected with a behavioral health professional or agency for guidance and assistance. You can contact notMYkid by texting the word "QUESTION" to our assistance line at (602) 584-8474. You'll be sent a form to fill out and a notMYkid staff
- member will contact you. You can also call notMYkid's office at (602) 652-0163.
- Visit our [resource and support](#) page to find behavioral health resource locators, information on support groups, and other behavioral health assistance.



*Educate your friends,
family members,
and other parents
on strategies related
to preventing youth
substance use*

SUBSTANCE USE PREVENTION, INTERVENTION, AND TREATMENT RESOURCES AND SUPPORT



Early Intervention Programs

[Project REWIND](#)

Behavioral Health Treatment Locators

[SAMHSA Behavioral Health Treatment
Services Locator](#)

[SAMHSA National Helpline:
1-800-662-4357 or 1-800-487-4889 \(TDD\)](#)

Safe Medication Disposal Locators

[ADHS Dump The Drugs AZ](#)

[Rx Disposal locations near you \(via Google Maps\)](#)

[DEA public disposal locations search](#)

12-Step Recovery Groups

[Alcoholics Anonymous](#)

[Marijuana Anonymous](#)

[Narcotics Anonymous](#)

[In The Rooms – Online global hourly
recovery meetings](#)

[Al-Anon and Alateen \(Support for family members\)](#)

Resources to Quit Vaping

[Truth Initiative – Quit smoking and vaping tools](#)

[This Is Quitting – Teens can text “DITCHJUUL”
88709 to get text support to quit vaping](#)

[This Is Quitting – Parents can text “QUIT” to
\(202\) 899-7550 to get text support to help
their teens quit vaping](#)

Podcast Episodes on Substance Use

[Win This Year Podcast –
“Taylor Popp’s Journey of Addiction and Recovery”](#)

[Win This Year Podcast –
“Kevin’s Last Walk – The Dangers of Binge
Drinking” \(Barry Adkins\)](#)

[Win This Year Podcast –
“Prescription Drug Misuse, Addiction,
and Recovery” \(Bobby Cording\)](#)

[Win This Year Podcast –
“The Survivor: How Matt Miller Overcame
a Near-Death Experience and Addiction](#)

[Win This Year Podcast –
“Substance Use Prevention Tips for Parents”
\(Kristen Polin and Tomas Barraza\)](#)

[Win This Year Podcast –
“I Turned 18 in Treatment: The Benefits
of Early Recovery”](#)