

SIGNS OF SUBSTANCE USE AND MISUSE



WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- Avoiding family time or previously enjoyed activities.
- A "nothing matters" attitude, reflected in low energy and withdrawal from previously enjoyed activities.
- Frequent arguments with family or friends, even minor ones that can quickly escalate into major conflicts.
- Defensive or secretive behavior, such as hiding their phone or avoiding questions about their whereabouts or new friends.
- Look for hidden places where substances like drugs or alcohol might be stored, such as in your youth's room or personal belongings (i.e. backpack, gym bag, or closet).

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Denial and Minimization

- "Everyone does it; it's normal."
- "It's not a big deal."
- "I only use it to relax/take the edge off."
- "I don't have a problem."



EARLY SIGNS

Behavior and Attitude

- New friend group
- Missing school or work
- Ignoring or breaking rules
- Frequently asking for money
- Making excuses (or outright lying)

ACTION PLAN

1. Parent Involvement

- Know your youth's friends and parents; discuss boundaries and substance use.
- Emphasize the importance of communication and assure your youth they can call you for a chat or pickup anytime.

2. Life Transitions

- Transitions in youth's lives, such as moving, divorce, puberty, changing schools, can create instability, prompting some to turn to substances for "comfort". Pay attention to behavior changes during these times.

3. Plan to Start Talking and Listening

- If your youth mentions trying substances, ask why. Understanding their feelings and reasoning, like peer pressure or anxiety, can help you identify where support is needed.

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