

Substance misuse truth

It's more than just kids experimenting



Who's misusing drugs, alcohol or tobacco? Probably not who you think.

It could be the:

- **Student athlete** who has knee surgery. He's given an opioid for pain and gets addicted without realizing it.
- **Academic scholar** who takes her friend's ADHD medicine to help get the grades to get into a choice college.
- **Preteen** who feels the pressure to fit in. She has a family history of dependence and doesn't know it. She uses her mom's prescriptions to feel good again.
- **Fed-up teen** who parties with alcohol and pot on the weekends to rebel his helicopter mom.
- **Middle schooler** who huffs (sniffs) glue or paint snatched from art class to videotape as her YouTube challenge.
- **Insecure teen** who doesn't fit in with students in his grade. He starts vaping nicotine with an older neighbor who shares.

Any young person is vulnerable, especially through life changes into puberty and adulthood.

Why it happens

Young people of all ages use drugs, alcohol and tobacco for different reasons, like to:¹

- Fit in
- Feel good
- Cope
- Perform better
- Try something new

They can find themselves susceptible to addiction, based on a lot of things — many they can't control:^{1,2,3}

- Family history of dependence
- Pain following surgery or injury
- Failing/poor academics
- Social difficulty
- Depression, anxiety and other mental health conditions
- Trauma, early life stress, or sexual/physical abuse
- Lack of supervision at home

Speak to your family doctor or other health professional right away if you're concerned someone you know could be misusing substances.



What you can do³



Be aware of substances you have at home.

Lock up alcohol, prescriptions and other substances. Keep them out of site. Educate yourself about what everyday things kids misuse at home. Look for things that go missing or end up in your trash.



Pay attention to your family history and personal situation.

If there's a family member with a substance use disorder or mental health issue, talk to your family doctor and all family members. Ask doctors about pain medicines you're worried about. Keep an eye out for behavior changes.



Talk with your whole family about the dangers of a substance use disorder.

Be truthful and open with kids and teens; keep talking about it. Brainstorm situations showing how to say no to peer pressure. Share if there's any reason they might be more vulnerable to substance use disorder or addiction.



Be active in your kids' lives. Set clear rules. Walk the talk.

Attend school events. Stay involved. Show you care, but let your loved ones know your limits are firm. What they see you do affects their decisions. Show them different ways to cope and express emotions.

What to look for¹

- Different behavior for no real reason – withdrawn, hostile, depressed, always tired
- Different set of friends
- Missing classes or declining grades
- No interest in school activities
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Escalating problems in relationships with friends and family

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¹ National Institute on Drug Abuse: *Principles of Adolescent Substance Use Disorder Treatment: A Research-Based Guide* (rev. January 2014); drugabuse.gov/publications/principles-adolescent-substance-use-disorder-treatment-research-based-guide.

² National Institute on Drug Abuse: *Preventing Drug Use among Children and Adolescents* (October 1, 2003); drugabuse.gov/publications/preventing-drug-use-among-children-adolescents-in-brief.

³ American Addiction Centers: *5 Ways to Help Protect Your Child From Drug Abuse* (June 17, 2014); americaaddictioncenters.org.

This information is meant to educate, not serve as medical advice. See your doctor for medical advice about your health.

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