

Police: What to do if Your Child is Using Drugs

Young people use drugs for many reasons that have to do with how they feel about themselves, how they get along with others, and how they live. No one factor determines who will use drugs and who will not, but here are some predictors:

- low grades or poor school performance;
- aggressive, rebellious behavior;
- excessive influence by peers;
- lack of parental support and guidance; and
- behavior problems at an early age.

Being alert to the signs of alcohol and other drug use requires a keen eye. It is sometimes hard to know the difference between normal teenage behavior and behavior caused by drugs. Changes that are extreme or that last for more than a few days may signal drug use.

Consider the following questions:

- Does your child seem withdrawn, depressed, tired, and careless about personal grooming?
- Has your child become hostile and uncooperative?
- Have your child's relationships with other family members deteriorated?
- Has your child dropped his old friends?
- Is your child no longer doing well in school - grades slipping, attendance irregular?
- Has your child lost interest in hobbies, sports, and other favorite activities?
- Have your child's eating or sleeping patterns changed?

Positive answers to any of these questions can indicate alcohol or other drug use. However, these signs may also apply to a child who is not using drugs but who may be having other problems at school or in the family. If you are in doubt, get help. Have your family doctor or local clinic examine your child to rule out illness or other physical problems.

Cocaine paraphernalia includes mirrors, razor blades, and scales used by drug dealers.

Watch for signs of drugs and drug paraphernalia as well. Possession of common items such as pipes, rolling papers, small medicine bottles, eye drops, or butane lighters may signal that your child is using drugs.

Powdered cocaine.

Even when the signs are clearer, usually after the child has been using drugs for a time, parents sometimes do not want to admit that their child could have a problem. Anger, resentment, guilt, and a sense of failure as parents are common reactions.

If your child is using drugs, it is important to avoid blaming yourself for the problem and to get whatever help is needed to stop it. The earlier a drug problem is detected and faced, the more likely it is that your child can be helped.

Marijuana paraphernalia includes rolling papers, clips, and pipes.

First, do not confront a child who is under the influence of alcohol or other drugs, but wait until the child is sober. Then discuss your suspicions with your child calmly and objectively. Bring in other members of the family to help, if necessary.

Second, impose whatever discipline your family has decided on for violating the rules and stick to it. Don't relent because the youngster promises never to do it again.

Many young people lie about their alcohol and drug use. If you think your child is not being truthful and the evidence is pretty strong, you may wish to have your child evaluated by a health professional experienced in diagnosing adolescents with alcohol- and drug-related problems.

If your child has developed a pattern of drug use or has engaged in heavy use, you will probably need help to intervene. If you do not know about drug treatment programs in your area, call your doctor, local hospital, or county mental health society for a referral. Your school district should have a substance abuse coordinator or a counselor who can refer you to treatment programs, too. Parents whose children have been through treatment programs can also provide information.