

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

CREATED BY: CRISIS INTERVENTION & PREVENTION TEAM



OUR CHILDREN'S FUTURE IS KEY: HOW TO SPOT DRUG USE IN CHILDREN AND TEENS

As a parent, you are the biggest influence in your child's life and having open, honest conversations is one of the most powerful ways to connect with your kids and help them develop into healthy adults. When addressing some more challenging topics – like nicotine, alcohol or drugs – it's not about having a one-time "drug talk," but rather tackling the subject through more frequent, organic conversations that evolve as your child gets older.

Things to keep in mind:

Keep lines of communication open and make sure you come from a place of love and compassion – even when you're having tough conversations. Balance any consequences with positive encouragement. Frequent touch points and teachable moments come up all the time — use these as natural opportunities to discuss substance use.

If you have reason to suspect use, don't be afraid to err on the side of caution. Prepare to take action and have a conversation during which you can ask direct questions like "Have you been drinking, vaping or using drugs?" No parent wants to hear "yes," but being prepared for how you would respond can be the starting point for a more positive outcome.

How to Spot the Signs of Drug Use:

Shifts in mood & personality

- Sullen, withdrawn or depressed
- Less motivated
- Silent, uncommunicative
- Hostile, angry, uncooperative
- Deceitful or secretive
- Unable to focus
- A sudden loss of inhibitions
- Hyperactive or unusually elated

Behavioral changes

- Changed relationships with family members or friends
- Absenteeism or a loss of interest in school, work or other activities
- Avoids eye contact
- Locks doors
- Disappears for long periods of time
- Goes out often, frequently breaking curfew
- Secretive with the use of their phone
- Makes endless excuses
- Uses chewing gum or mints to cover up breath
- Often uses over-the-counter preparations to reduce eye reddening or nasal irritation
- Has cash flow problems
- Has become unusually clumsy: stumbling, lacking coordination, poor balance
- Has periods of sleeplessness or high energy, followed by long periods of "catch up" sleep



Hygiene & appearance

- Smell of smoke or other unusual smells on breath or on clothes
- Messier than usual appearance
- Poor hygiene
- Frequently red or flushed cheeks or face
- Burns or soot on fingers or lips
- Unusual marks on arms or legs

Physical health

- Frequent sickness
- Unusually tired and/or lethargic
- Unable to speak intelligibly, slurred speech or rapid-fire speech
- Nosebleeds and/or runny nose, not caused by allergies or a cold
- Sores, spots around mouth
- Sudden or dramatic weight loss or gain
- Skin abrasions/bruises
- Frequent perspiration
- Seizures and/or vomiting

The limits you set with your child don't stop at the front door or their bedroom door. If you have cause for concern, it's important to find out what's going on. Be prepared to explain your reasons for a search though, whether or not you tell them about it beforehand. You can let them know it's out of concern for their health and safety. Common places to conceal vapes, alcohol, drugs or paraphernalia include:

- Inside drawers, beneath or between other items
- In small boxes or cases — think jewelry, makeup or pencil cases, or cases for earbuds
- Under a bed or other pieces of furniture
- In a plant, buried in the dirt
- In between or inside books
- Under a loose floor board
- Inside over-the-counter medicine containers (Tylenol, Advil, etc.)
- Inside empty candy bags such as M&Ms or Skittles
- In fake soda cans or other fake containers designed to conceal



When teenagers are struggling with emotional problems, they often turn to alcohol or drug use to help them manage painful or difficult feelings. But because adolescent brains are still developing, the results of teenage “self-medication” can be more immediately problematic. In the short term, substance use can help alleviate unwanted mental health symptoms like hopelessness, anxiety, irritability and negative thoughts. But in the longer term it exacerbates them, and often ends in abuse or dependence. Substance use escalates from experimentation to a serious disorder much faster in adolescents than it does in adults, and that progression is more likely to happen in kids with mental health disorders than in other kids.



Resources:

(click titles to be taken to links)

[Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration](#)

[National Institute on Drug Abuse](#)

[Growing up Drug Free: A Parent's Guide to Prevention](#)

[Crisis Team Website](#)

[Tarrant Cares](#)

[Mental Health Connection](#)

[Recognize & Rise](#)

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We are here for you, even more so during these trying times, which can further cause distress for kids who already have issues with anxiety, depression, and general worry over what is happening in our country at this time. We can provide support through crisis intervention, mental health referrals and on-campus check-ins for students and their families.

You can submit a referral to our team by clicking [HERE](#)