

Substance Use in Teenagers

Behavioral Health Tips

Adolescence is a time of development and maturation. Teenagers are by definition transitioning from childhood to adulthood. Teens are learning about themselves and starting to establish an identity that is separate from their parents and/or guardians. In this process, teens often look to adults and adult behaviors and try to model them, even when they are not legal or age-appropriate. In the US, substance abuse has become a significant issue, with health, economic, social, and political implications. While some states have moved to legalize certain class 1 narcotics like cannabis, others have continued to criminalize their use. No substances – nicotine, cannabis and alcohol included – are legal for minors, however a majority of minors admit to trying at least one substance prior to their eighteenth birthday. Substance abuse can take on many forms. While many teens try substances and do not return to them, others are hooked by their addictive properties and can develop significant problems.

Warning Signs:

Parents, family, friends and medical providers should be on the lookout for teens who are using substances. Certain substances disinhibit behaviors and others make users more aggressive or more relaxed. Care givers should look for explicit time-limited behavioral changes that seem out of line with normal behavior. They should look for clues that their teens are not following the rules – breaking curfew, spending time with older individuals, changing friend groups etc can be some of the signs. Care givers should also look for physical signs including red eyes, certain smells, needle marks, nosebleeds or changes in sleep/eating habits. Substances are often used by teens to self-medicate for mental and physical health problems. Care givers of teens with these should be extra careful not to miss key signs. Getting teens connected with care can help foster healthy coping and make it less likely that they will turn to substances to alleviate their distress.

For more information

Cohen Children's Medical Center

Pediatric Behavioral Health- Rockville Centre
100 Merrick Road
Rockville Centre, NY 11570

516-927-1630

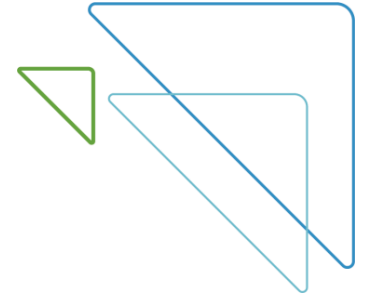
Pediatric Behavioral Health- Mineola
156 First Street
Mineola, NY 11501

516-321-5770

How Parents Can Help:

Care givers can take the lead in advocating for their children to stay away from drugs and help them if they start using. From an early age, care givers should be open with children that substances exist and will likely be used by peers. They should empower children to stay away and help them recognize that rebelling against peer pressure is not an easy task and requires heroic efforts. They should care by example: children residing in households in which a legal guardian uses are significantly more likely to use themselves. Care givers should remain aware of where their children are at all times

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and make decisions to help teens avoid situations and environments with increased risk of substance use.

If care givers discover that their teens are using substances, they should clearly tell their teens how they feel. They might need to parent more closely and demand that their teens avoid derailing situations. If teens continue to use, care givers should seek professional advice and encourage their teens to get therapy and/or medications to treat both the addictive behaviors and any underlying mental health issues.

Additional Information:

1. <http://familydoctor.org/>
2. www.healthychildren.org
3. <https://www.samhsa.gov/iccpud>
4. [www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families and Youth/Family Resources/Home.aspx](http://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Family_Resources/Home.aspx)
5. www.al-anon.org
6. [The Parent Toll-Free Helpline](#), 1-855-DRUGFREE (1-855-378-4373), is staffed by clinical social workers with practical experience in substance abuse prevention and treatment.
7. Apps to help teens in Recovery available in iOS and Android:
 - Recoverize
 - Recovery Key
 - Friend of Jimmy