

IF YOU SUSPECT YOUR CHILD IS USING ALCOHOL OR OTHER DRUGS:

You are faced with a painful and scary reality that many parents are not ready for, or equipped to deal with. The feelings you have may be intense or overwhelming. It is important for you and your child that you do not allow your feelings to cloud your decision making process.

This is time for you to carefully plan your response to your child's possible chemical use and take positive action.

At this point many parents ask **What do I do now?** As a parent you have options.

Option One: Do nothing. Some parents believe that chemical use by an adolescent is only experimentation and a normal part of the adolescent life stage. A phase they will grow out of. Others believe that if the adolescent gets into enough trouble they will stop using mind altering chemicals on their own.

Our philosophy is that the use of mind-altering substances is such a risk to the emotional, psychological, spiritual and intellectual development of a young person that their use cannot be tolerated for any reason. Addiction occurs in a very short period of time for adolescents (about six months).

Option Two: Ask your child to submit to a drug test. This a helpful tool to help the child gain back trust or to confirm the suspicions of a parent. A drug test can be administered on a random basis.

Option Three: Have your child complete a chemical use assessment. If your child is using drugs of abuse, he/she has a relationship with chemicals. A chemical use assessment done by an addiction counselor could give more information about the nature and extent of the relationship. If your child is experiencing family, legal, academic, or personal problems, or is working far below their potential, chemical abuse may be an underlying cause. All of Fountain Center outpatient sites offer FREE chemical use screenings.

Option Four: Enroll your child in a drug education program/treatment. Drug education programs and treatments are designed to provide adolescents with information about drug use and harmful consequences. They are also designed to help adolescents take a look at how their chemical use is affecting not only their life, but the lives around them.

Option Five: Seek more information. As a parent you have the right to seek more information about your child and his/her chemical use. Contact his/her school and get progress reports from teachers, counselors, etc. Contact parents of your child's friends to learn more about his/her friends and their habits and hobbies. Other parents may have concerns or information they could share with you to shed more light on your child's behavior and chemical use. Read books, magazine articles and any other sources of information about drugs of abuse. Information is a powerful tool in fighting adolescent chemical abuse. Get yourself into counseling to assist in developing strategies for dealing with this issue.

Option Six: Create or join a support group. Sharing your experiences with other parents or individuals who are affected by someone else's chemical use will help empower you and break the sense of isolation that can surround the issue. Other parents may have experiences or information that is helpful to you. An example of a support group in the area is Al-Anon.

FOUNTAIN CENTERS

A Mayo Clinic Health System program for substance abuse and addiction

FAMILY COMMUNICATION TIPS:

- Speak in a calm voice.
- Say what you mean and be prepared to listen.
- Try not to interrupt the other person.
- Avoid sarcasm, whining, and threats or yelling.
- Do not make personal attacks or be demeaning.
- Do not think your answer is the only answer.
- Try not to use words like “always” or “never”.
- Deal with the “now”, not the past.
- Do not try and get the last word.
- If things get too heated, take a break and come back to the discussion later.
- Make allowances for the other person. *Parents:* remember what it was like to be a teen. *Teens:* remember that parents frequently react strongly because they know the stakes are high.
- Acknowledge that you are in this together. Build on your communication successes to address other subjects.

“Decisions.” Students Against Destructive Decisions Newsletter December 2000:4.

HOW TO HELP SOMEONE WITH A DRUG OR ALCOHOL PROBLEM:

- Don’t confront a person about his or her use while he or she is under the influence. Wait until later when the effects of the drug have completely worn off.
- State your intentions—that you are confronting the person out of caring and concern, not blame or judgment. You intend to be helpful and assist the person in regaining control over this or her life.
- State your motivation—that you are having the conversation, however difficult, because you care what happens to him or her. If you didn’t care, you wouldn’t bring it up.
- Point out observable changes you see or have noticed on more than one occasion and share your concerns.
- Express how the person’s behavior makes you feel. Express your feelings clearly.
- State why you think the person needs help in stopping the addiction. Many other people are recovering from addiction and lead successful lives. Getting well and staying well often requires the help of others.
- State what you will do next. This could include assisting the person in getting help as well as involving other significant people in the person’s life in an intervention.

Falkowski, Carol. “Dangerous Drugs: An Easy-to-Use Reference for Parents and Professionals”. Center City, MN: Hazelden, 2000.