



Here for your loved one's recovery

Know the signs of substance use disorder in teens and young adults

You've noticed some changes in your teen or young adult. Maybe they're behaving oddly. Or maybe they're more emotional than usual and you're concerned. You can't put your finger on what's happening but you know something doesn't seem right. Are these behaviors normal for teens or young adults? Or are they using drugs or alcohol? If they are using, they may be showing signs of a substance use disorder.

What is substance use disorder?

- The first thing to know about substance use disorder: It is a disease. It is not about being a bad or weak person. It can affect anyone, from all walks of life and at any age. And it can be treated in a variety of ways.
- Drug or alcohol use can start for many reasons. It might begin with peer pressure. Some may use substances to mask depression or anxiety. Others may just want to see what it's like to use. They find that the substances give them feelings of pleasure or help them deal with painful feelings.

- Some people begin using more and more often. They may become addicted, physically, mentally or both. Substance use can eventually take over a person's life. It can affect their decisions. Their lifestyle may change for the worse. It may become harder for them to function day to day. School and family responsibilities may suffer.

It's important to know the signs and symptoms of substance use. Then you may be able to help get your loved one the treatment they need.

Club drugs: Drugs known as "club drugs" are popular with teens and young adults. Club drugs include ecstasy (also known as molly) and ketamine, among others. These drugs are dangerous and can reduce awareness. That's why they are often a culprit in cases of sexual assault.

Warning signs may include:

- Changes in relationships with friends and family, hanging out with a new crowd
- Avoiding eye contact, locking doors, having secret phone calls
- Going out at night but won't tell you where
- Disappearing for hours or even days at a time
- Unexplained mood swings
- Skipping school, not finishing schoolwork, a drop in grades
- Slurred speech, clumsy movements
- Missing and/or hidden alcohol
- Pills missing from your medicine cabinet
- Missing cash or possessions (especially things that can be sold easily, like jewelry)

Signs may differ depending on the substance used. But if any of these signs sound familiar, substance use may be the issue.

How to find help

If you're worried about someone's alcohol or drug use, don't be afraid to talk to them. You can't fix their disease. But you can be supportive. Let them know you want them to get better.

Start here – Tell them you're concerned.

- Tell them why (moods, missing pills, empty bottles, etc.), but don't accuse or shame them.
- Keep calm, even if they get upset with you. Keep telling them how much you care.
- Sit side by side. They may feel more comfortable if they don't have to make eye contact.
- Think about joining a support group. It can help you learn to take care of yourself and better understand your loved one's substance use.

Seek outside help and education – Call your doctor, school nurse or guidance counselor, or therapist.

Sources:

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. College drinking.
National Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. Teens: Alcohol and other drugs.
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Results from the 2018 national survey on drug use and health: Detailed tables.
National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Alcohol use disorder.

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Facts and figures*:

37% of college students (18–22) report binge drinking in the past month.

More than 4,000,000 youth (12–17) reported using illicit drugs in 2018.

12 is the average age for trying alcohol for the first time.

Nearly 2,000 college students (18–24) die from injuries related to drinking alcohol.

Less than 10% of people with alcohol use disorder receive treatment.

*Based on U.S. statistics.

For more information about recovery, visit: liveandworkwell.com. Login using your HealthSafeID® or company access code: EAP.

To connect with specialists trained in addressing substance use disorders, call the Optum Substance Use Disorder Helpline at **1-855-780-5955**. It's confidential and available 24/7.

If you or someone you know are experiencing thoughts of suicide or something else that is urgent or an emergency, call 911 or the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at **988**.

Learn about your options – Check with your loved one's insurance company to understand treatment options and benefits before seeking help.

National Institute on Drug Abuse. MDMA (ecstasy) abuse.
Drug Enforcement Administration. Talking to your child when you suspect drug use. [Helpguide.org](https://helpguide.org). Drug abuse and addiction.
Mayo Clinic. Mayo Clinic. Drug addiction (substance use disorder).
National Institute on Drug Abuse. How to recognize a substance use disorder.

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