NCADD
NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG DEPENDENCE, INC.

What to Look for – Signs and Symptoms

Do you suspect that your child is abusing alcohol or using drugs? Are you worried? Have you noticed some changes with your child? As a parent, it is normal to be concerned. Listen to your intuitive voice and read on!

How Are Parents Affected?: Before we discuss what you need to look for if you are concerned about your child, including the signs and symptoms of alcohol and drug use, we need to talk about how you have been affected by their alcohol and drug use. Your ability to be helpful depends on how much you understand about alcohol and drugs as well as how you have been affected by their alcohol and drug use.

In fact, **the most important thing you can do** to help your son or daughter is to commit to getting help and support for yourself!

To better understand how you have been affected, and find out if you need some help, answer these questions:

- Alcohol: Are You Troubled by Someone's Drinking?
- Drugs: Do You Need Nar-Anon?

Warning Signs:

The use and abuse of alcohol and drugs are serious issues that should not be ignored or minimized and we should not sit back and hope they just go away. If left untreated, use and abuse can develop into drug dependence or alcoholism. As a result, it is important to recognize the signs and symptoms of alcohol and drug abuse early. If you're worried that your son or daughter might be abusing alcohol or drugs, here are some of the warning signs to look for:

1. **Physical and health warning signs of drug abuse**

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Eyes that are bloodshot or pupils that are smaller or larger than normal.

- Frequent nosebleeds could be related to snorted drugs (meth or cocaine)
- Changes in appetite or sleep patterns. Sudden weight loss or weight gain.
- Seizures without a history of epilepsy
- Deterioration in personal grooming or physical appearance.
- Impaired coordination, injuries/accidents/bruises that they won't or can't tell you about- they don't know how they got hurt
- Unusual smells on breath, body, or clothing.
- Shakes, tremors, incoherent or slurred speech, impaired or unstable coordination.

2. **Behavioral signs of alcohol or drug abuse**

- Skipping class, declining grades, getting in trouble at school
- Drop in attendance and performance at work- loss of interest in extracurricular activities, hobbies, sports or exercise- decreased motivation
- Complaints from co-workers, supervisors, teachers or classmates
- Missing money, valuables, prescription or prescription drugs, borrowing and stealing money
- Acting isolated, silent, withdrawn, engaging in secretive or suspicious behaviors
- Clashes with family values and beliefs
- Preoccupation with alcohol and drug-related lifestyle in music, clothing and posters
- Demanding more privacy, locking doors and avoiding eye contact
- Sudden change in relationships, friends, favorite hangouts, and hobbies.
- Frequently getting into trouble (arguments, fights, accidents, illegal activities)
- Using incense, perfume, air freshener to hide smell of smoke or drugs
- Using eyedrops to mask bloodshot eyes and dilated pupils

3. **Psychological warning signs of alcohol or drug abuse**

- Unexplained, confusing change in personality and/or attitude.
- Sudden mood changes, irritability, angry outbursts or laughing at nothing.
- Periods of unusual hyperactivity or agitation.
- Lack of motivation; inability to focus, appears lethargic or "spaced out."
- Appears fearful, withdrawn, anxious, or paranoid, with no apparent reason.

Signs and symptoms of alcoholism and drug dependence:

Alcoholism involves all the symptoms of alcohol abuse, but also involves another element: physical dependence- tolerance and withdrawal.

1. Tolerance:

Tolerance means that, over time, you need more alcohol to feel the same effect. Do you drink more than you used to? Do you drink more than other people without showing obvious signs of intoxication?

2. Withdrawal:

As the effect of the alcohol wears off you may experience withdrawal symptoms: anxiety or jumpiness; shakiness or trembling; sweating, nausea and vomiting, insomnia, depression, irritability, fatigue or loss of appetite and headaches. Do you drink to steady the nerves, stop the shakes in the morning? Drinking to relieve or avoid withdrawal symptoms is a sign of alcoholism and addiction.

In severe cases, withdrawal from alcohol can be life-threatening and involve hallucinations, confusion, seizures, fever, and agitation. These symptoms can be dangerous and should be managed by a physician specifically trained and experienced in dealing with alcoholism and addiction.

3. Loss of Control:

Drinking more than you wanted to, for longer than you intended, or despite telling yourself that you wouldn’t do it this time.

4. Desire to Stop - But Can’t:

You have a persistent desire to cut down or stop your alcohol use, but all efforts to stop and stay stopped, have been unsuccessful.

5. Neglecting Other Activities:

You are spending less time on activities that used to be important to you (hanging out with family and friends, exercising- going to the gym, pursuing your hobbies or other interests) because of the use of alcohol.

6. Alcohol Takes Up Greater Time, Energy and Focus:

You spend a lot of time drinking, thinking about it, or recovering from its effects. You have few, if any, interests, social or community involvements that don't revolve around the use of alcohol.

7. Continued Use Despite Negative Consequences:

You drink even though they know it's causing problems. As an example, you realize that your alcohol use is interfering with your ability to do your job, is damaging your marriage, making your problems worse, or causing health problems, but you continue to drink.

For additional information, Learn About Alcohol, Learn About Drugs or Get Help may be helpful.