

DRUGS & TEENS

We know drugs are harmful. But teens keep using them. Use this as a guide to the why, what, and how of drug and alcohol use.

FIRST, WHY DO TEENS TRY DRUGS?

1. Other people, friends, and peer pressure
2. Popular media
3. To escape
4. Boredom
5. Instant satisfaction
6. To be more confident
7. False information



DRUGS AND TEENS: WHAT ARE THE TRENDS?

- 66% of students have tried alcohol by 12th grade.¹
- About 50% of 9th- through 12th-grade students report ever having used marijuana.¹
- About 40% of 9th- through 12th-grade students report having tried cigarettes.¹
- 62% of teenagers in 12th grade have abused alcohol.²
- 85% of teenagers in Delaware reported using marijuana in the last month.²
- By the time they're in 12th grade, 46.6% of teens have tried illicit drugs.²
- Marijuana vaping among 12th graders nearly doubled in a single year to 14% from 7.5%—the second-largest one-year jump ever tracked for any substance in the history of the NIDA survey.³

WHAT DRUGS ARE OUT THERE?

Some of the most common drugs used by teenagers are alcohol, marijuana, opioids, stimulants, prescription pills of all kinds, and methamphetamine.

HOW DO I SPOT THEM?

It can be hard to tell when teens are using drugs or alcohol. Here are some common signs to look for in your teen:

Mood

- Withdrawn
- Less motivated
- Hostile
- Secretive
- Unable to focus
- Hyper

Behavior

- Loss of interest in school, work, or other activities
- Avoids eye contact
- Starts locking doors
- Disappears often
- Secretive with their phone use
- Often makes excuses

Appearance

- Smell of smoke
- Messier than usual
- Poor hygiene
- Red cheeks or face
- Burns or soot on fingers or lips
- Track marks on arms or legs

Health

- Sick a lot
- Tired a lot
- Slurred or rapid-fire speech
- Nosebleeds
- Sores around mouth
- Sudden, dramatic weight change
- Skin rashes or bruises
- Frequent sweating
- Seizures and/or vomiting

HOW DO DRUGS AND ALCOHOL *AFFECT* THE BRAIN?

- Memory impairment, including blackouts, which teens are more sensitive to than adults as their brains are still developing
- Less sensitive to the sedation of alcohol, making binge drinking more likely
- Poor decision making and impulse control
- Decreased motor skills and balance
- Delays in developing executive functioning (judgment, organizing, completing tasks)
- Immature and exaggerated emotional responses to situations
- Increased risk for addiction, especially if starting use at a young age
- Exaggerated feelings (possible result of drug use), leading to a cycling of emotions, which can lead to addiction in an effort to manage those emotions

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP TEENS *AVOID* DRUGS AND ALCOHOL?

Be involved. Focus on quality time that allows you to get a feel for their interests and activities, and how they spend their time.

Talk. For real. Families, parents, guardians, and educators can be a teen's biggest influence. Whether you know it or not, they're listening. Let them know this is important to you.

Ask open-ended questions. Ask in a nonjudgmental, open-ended way, so you're more likely to get an honest response.

Stay open. Try to show them that you want to understand how they're feeling and what temptations they're experiencing. Make sure they understand how you feel too.

Share with them. Teenage years are tough. Yours probably were too. Teens may be surprised to learn you also had pressures and temptations to use drugs or alcohol. Remind them that you're on their side and they can trust you. Set a good example by modeling healthy behavior by drinking responsibly.

Keep prescriptions safe. There may be dangerous drugs at home or at school, even ones prescribed by a health care provider.

As teens learn about prescription drugs that are taken for fun, they may try to see what they can find.

- Make sure prescriptions are stored safely.
- Find a local drug disposal location for any leftover, expired, or unused medications at [HelpsHereDE.com/DropBox](https://www.helpshere.com/dropbox).



¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

² U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) Monitoring the Future survey, 2021

³ U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) Monitoring the Future survey, 2019

WHAT ELSE CAN I *DO*?

You can visit talk2kidsaboutdrugs.com for trusted, factual information for families and educators.