

Signs of Drug Use in Children

The latest National Survey on Drug Use & Health (NSDUH) reports that marijuana is still the illegal drug most often used in this country, at a rate of 6.2 percent in the general population.¹ Most marijuana users polled in 2002 (56.7 percent) got the drug for free or shared someone else's marijuana, and almost 40 percent bought it.

Other highlights from the NSDUH survey show that in 2002:

- 11.6 percent of youths aged 12 to 17 were current illegal drug users
- slightly more than half of youths aged 12 to 17 (55.0 percent) answered that it would be fairly or very easy to obtain marijuana
- youths were less likely to use substances if they thought that their parents would disapprove of it—among these youths, only 5.5 percent had used marijuana in the past month
- among youths who thought that their parents would only somewhat disapprove or neither approve nor disapprove of their trying marijuana, 30.2 percent reported past month use of marijuana

Another report from the National Institute on Drug Abuse states that inhalants are abused more often by younger children than older ones, with about 6 percent of U.S. children having tried inhalants by the time they reach the fourth grade.²

Other common substances of abuse include acid (LSD), club drugs (a group of drugs popular at rave parties), methamphetamine, PCP (phencyclidine), MDMA (ecstasy), anabolic steroids, heroin, prescription medication, and alcohol.

What To Know...The Warning Signs of Drug Abuse

As children grow up they take up new fads—hair styles, clothing, speech—but sudden and extreme changes in your child may signal drug use. Be alert if your child displays major changes in:

- Personality
 - Becomes disrespectful—is verbally and physically abusive
 - Is angry a lot, acts paranoid or confused, or suffers from extreme mood swings
 - Seems depressed and less out-going than usual
 - Is secretive and lies about what he is doing and where he is going
 - Is stealing or “losing” possessions he used to value
 - Seems to have a lot of money, or is always asking for money
 - Withdraws from the family and family activities
- Physical appearance
 - Not taking care of hygiene and grooming
 - Not sleeping or sleeping too much
 - Loss of appetite
 - Weight loss or weight gain
 - Too hyperactive or too little energy
- Social Activity/School performance
 - Drops old friends and activities
 - Is skipping school
 - Loses interest in school work and is getting low grades
 - Is sleeping in class
 - Loses concentration and is having trouble remembering things

What To Do...How To Help Your Child

If you think your child may have a problem with drugs:

- Have your child examined by a doctor to rule out physical causes and illness
- Talk to other adults—family members and friends, teachers, school nurses and school counselors—who know your child well. Are they seeing the same changes in your child that you do?
- Talk to your child—remember young people may not be truthful about drug use, and you may have to have a professional evaluation from someone experienced in diagnosing children with drug-related problems.
- Get treatment referrals from trustworthy agencies or individuals—your doctor, local hospital, state or local substance abuse agencies, other parents whose children have been in drug treatment, or call the Iowa Substance Abuse Information Center, 1-866-242-4111.
- Examine your child's mental health—a child with emotional or social problems may use drugs for self-medication
- Don't deny that there is a problem—your child needs your help and parental support
- Avoid blaming yourself or any other family member for the problem—focus on getting whatever help is needed as soon as possible

Drug use by one member of the family often affects other family members as well. Whatever your situation, keep the lines of communication open with other children in the home as much as possible, and get family counseling, if it is recommended.

Keep in mind that all is not lost. Young people can recover from the effects of drug abuse, and go on to live healthy, productive lives.

Sources:

¹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. [SAMHSA's National Survey on Drug Use & Health](#), last referenced 10/01/03.

² National Institute on Drug Abuse. [NIDA Research Reports: Inhalant Abuse](#), last referenced 10/01/03

Additional Resources:

- American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Facts for Families: [Know When to Seek Help for Your Child](#)
- NIDA [Information on Common Drugs of Abuse](#)
- NIDA InfoFacts: [Science-Based Facts on Drug Abuse and Addiction](#)
- SAMHSA's [Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator](#)