

Substance Abuse & Teens

When teenagers drink or take drugs, they are more likely to use in excessive, as they are less prone to the negative effects of intoxication such as hangovers. They are also less likely to be aware that substance abuse at this time in their lives can lead to permanent physical and/or mental problems.

Sadly, parents often underestimate the exposure their teens have to alcohol or other drugs. Many parents would be shocked to learn that the average age of drug use is 15.7 years, and that 60% of illicit drug users are between 15 and 24 years old (Stats Canada). An open and frank conversation with teenagers about alcohol and other drug use may help prevent serious problems.

By far **ALCOHOL & MARIJUANA** are the mostly commonly used drugs by teens, as they are the easiest to obtain and most affordable. An extensive study by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health of Ontario students from 1977-2009 found that 83% of Grade 12 students drink alcohol and 49% admitted to binge drinking on a weekly basis.

Studies have shown that excessive alcohol use starting in adolescence can have significant **PHYSICAL EFFECTS** including damage to the liver, endocrine system, and bone development; even hindering normal growth and maturation. Studies have shown that excessive drinking during puberty can interfere with regular pituitary function, delaying the release of normal sex hormones, affecting both ovary development and regular testosterone release. Marijuana use can lead to impaired coordination and slower reflexes. It is as harmful to your lungs as smoking tobacco. If dependence develops, severe withdrawal symptoms can occur when the use of marijuana is stopped.

During adolescence the brain is also changing - this is possibly why teenagers seem more sensitive to the

MENTAL EFFECTS alcohol can have on the brain, notably spatial memory. Heavy drinking can permanently affect how the brain functions especially how it learns a task. After repeated actions, the nerve impulses skip nerve cell gaps, creating in effect a new memory of how to do something. Heavy drinking can slow down this process making learning new tasks slower and more difficult.



did you know?

Teenagers who started drinking at age 14 or earlier are 4 times more likely to develop problems with alcohol in later years, than those who began drinking at 21. A few studies suggest that early alcohol abuse may impair neurodevelopment, resulting in increased risk for later substance abuse.



PRESCRIPTION DRUG abuse is a relatively newer problem and accounts from about 17% of the substance abuse problems of teenagers in Canada. However, according to drugfreecanada.org, 1 in every 5 teenagers has admitted to taking prescription drugs to get high and 75% said they stole them from home. Teenagers call 'getting high by stealing their parents' prescription drugs 'pharming'. The prescription drugs most abused are painkillers, stimulants and depressants.

See teenagers' names for these drugs at
http://notinmyhouse.drugfree.org/cultural_lingo

When drugs are prescribed by a physician, many things are taken into consideration, including family history, allergies, other medications, and possible side effects, to determine the correct medication, its dosage, and frequency of use. Yet when teenagers use prescription drugs to get high, they do so without any precautions. Therefore, they are subject to many dangerous **PHYSICAL EFFECTS**, especially if they combine them with other drugs including alcohol. They have no way of knowing what adverse reactions can occur, including severe brain damage and even death.

Even if these prescription drugs are taken by themselves - excessive use or heavy doses can have significant effects. Abusing stimulants can cause an irregular heartbeat; abusing painkillers and depressants can cause permanent lack of coordination or even seizures; abusing opioids can lead to drowsiness and slowed breathing.

No long term studies have been conducted to determine the **MENTAL EFFECTS** of teenage prescription drug abuse but extrapolations can be made. Many opioids are very similar to illegal drugs like heroin, and fundamentally are treated the same in the body. Tolerance can develop, meaning more of the drug will be needed to induce a 'high', resulting in detrimental effects, including causing permanent brain damage.

IF YOU SUSPECT YOUR TEENAGER OF USING ALCOHOL OR OTHER DRUGS, then you may need to seek help to address the issue. There are many resources available online with useful websites like drugfreecanada.org. Health Canada produces a brochure of tips and pointers <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/pubs/adp-apd/talk-aborder/index-eng.php>.

Besides opening an honest dialogue with your teenager, to decrease the chance that they misuse alcohol or other drugs:

- Be aware of who their friends are. Be mindful of the influence these friends may have on your teenager. During adolescence, friends & peers are very important and have a huge influence on how your teen acts.
- Help them with their self-confidence. Provide a safe, nurturing home environment where failure is not necessarily met with anger. Teenagers who describe themselves as happy as much less likely to abuse alcohol or other drugs.
- Avoid lectures and focus on 'teachable moments'. If you watch a movie about drug use, take the time to discuss it with your teenagers, without sounding like you are ordering them around.

IF YOU ARE WORRIED THAT YOU ARE NOT GETTING THROUGH TO YOUR TEENAGER WHO MAY HAVE A PROBLEM, CONSIDER CONTACTING YOUR EFAP FOR HELP.

YOUR LOGO HERE

For confidential assistance
1.800.668.2055
www.browncrawshaw.com

