



# How to Tell If Your Child Is Drinking Alcohol or Using Other Drugs

## Warning Signs



Although the following signs may indicate that your child has a problem with alcohol or other drugs, some also reflect normal growing pains. Research shows that drinking or other drug use problems are more likely if you notice several of these signs at the same time, if they occur suddenly, or if some of them are extreme in nature:

- Mood changes: flare-ups of temper, irritability, or defensiveness;
- School problems: poor attendance, low grades, or recent disciplinary action;
- Rebellion against family rules;
- Friend changes: switching friends and showing a reluctance to let you get to know the new friends;
- A “nothing matters” attitude: sloppy appearance, a lack of involvement in former interests, or low energy;
- Presence of alcohol or other drugs: finding it in their room or backpack, smelling it on their breath, or noticing new use of cover-ups like perfume/cologne, mouthwash, or mints/gum;
- Physical or mental problems: memory lapses, poor concentration, bloodshot eyes, lack of coordination, or slurred speech; and
- Social media posts that contain images or references to drinking alcohol or using other drugs.

## Finding Help

### *Act quickly*

It can be hard for most parents and caregivers to believe that their child might be involved in underage drinking or other drug use and in need of professional help. It’s common to miss the warning signs until they are in trouble or until someone tells you about the problem. If you find out that your child is drinking alcohol or using other drugs, you may feel shocked and stunned, and wonder where things went wrong.

When getting them help, it’s important to act quickly. Search for the best available services and support, and make sure they have what they need to start building a substance-free future.

### *Talk with people you know*

If you’re seeking services or support for your child, it’s important to work with local doctors, their school, and your health insurance company. If you’re looking for substance use treatment programs, keep in mind that there are limited options for youth. Your health insurance company can give you a list of substance use support and treatment providers. If your employer has an employee assistance program, you can also get a referral there. Your child’s school and/or school district may suggest other support services as well. Be sure to contact these resources for help as soon as possible.



### Contact a professional

Your county’s health department probably has substance use, mental health, and/or behavioral health services and is another good source of information. Calling the county health department’s general information number is a good place to start and should help point you in the right direction.

### Find a local resource

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator (<https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>) includes a Quick Search feature to help you find alcohol and other drug use disorder treatment programs in your area.

## Use Screen4Success

Talking with kids early and often about the risks and dangers of underage drinking and other drug use can help keep them safe. But how do you know if your child needs more support, and where do you go to find it? Screen4Success will help you better understand your child’s health, wellness, and wellbeing and find resources to help address their needs.

## HELPFUL RESOURCES



Use and share Screen4Success.



Download and use “Talk. They Hear You.” mobile app.



Subscribe and listen to “What Parents Are Saying” podcast.



Download and order “Talk. They Hear You.” materials online from SAMHSA Store.



Download and read full “Tips for Teens” fact sheet series.



Download and read other SAMHSA underage drinking prevention and reduction materials.

