

SUBSTANCE EXPERIMENTATION/ABUSE IN ADOLESCENTS

Substance use can potentially lead to long-term social and health problems, injury, and even death for teens and adolescents. Research shows that a child's growth, memory, development and learning abilities can be affected by tobacco, alcohol, and drugs. Teens and adolescents who abuse these substances may have trouble finding their identity, building relationship skills, and becoming emotionally stable. Continued use and abuse increases the risk of serious drug use later in life, school failure, and poor judgment that may put teens at risk for accidents, violence, unplanned and unsafe sex, and suicide. They also may have trouble preparing for their future.

Unfortunately, teens and adolescents don't often see the link between their actions today and the consequences tomorrow. They also have a tendency to feel indestructible and immune to the problems that others experience. The reality is that substance experimentation can grow very quickly into abuse and addiction, specifically for teens or adolescents at risk. Teenagers who are at risk for developing serious alcohol and drug problems include:

- Those who feel like they don't fit in or are out of the mainstream
- Those with a family history of substance abuse Those who are depressed
- Those who have low self-esteem

COMMONLY ABUSED SUBSTANCES

A variety of drugs, both legal and illegal are commonly experimented with or abused by teens and adolescents. Legally available drugs more often used include alcohol, prescribed medications, inhalants (fumes from glues, aerosols, and solvents) and over-the-counter cough, cold, sleep, and diet medications. The most commonly used

illegal drugs are marijuana (pot), stimulants (cocaine, crack, and speed), LSD, PCP, opiates, heroin, and designer drugs (Ecstasy). The use of illegal drugs is increasing at a very high rate, especially among young teens. The average age of first marijuana use is 14, and alcohol use can typically start before age 12.

WARNING SIGNS OF TEENAGE ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE

The following are a few red flags of potential signs of abuse:

- Physical – fatigue, repeated health complaints, red and glazed eyes, and a lasting cough
- Emotional – personality changes, sudden mood changes, irritability, irresponsible behavior, low self-esteem, poor judgment, depression, and a general lack of interest
- Family – starting arguments, breaking the rules, or withdrawing from the family
- School – decreased interests, frequent & prolonged negative attitude, a drop in grades, many absences, truancy, and discipline problems
- Social problems – making new “friends” who are less interested in typical home and school activities, problems with the law, and changes to less conventional styles in dress and music

Parents can potentially prevent children from using drugs by talking to them about drugs, creating an open communication, role modeling of responsible behavior, and recognizing if problems are developing.

If you have concerns you may want to consult a physician to rule out physical causes of the warning signs. It is advised to follow up with a comprehensive evaluation by a child and adolescent psychiatrist or mental health professional.

TREATMENT

A variety of programs are available. The programs usually provide education and individual, family, and group counseling. They are often based on the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous.

Another type of inpatient program is the therapeutic community. Wilderness treatment programs like Pacific Quest combine a wilderness experience and some form of treatment. Based on experience, Pacific Quest recommends the Sustainable Growth Wilderness Therapy Model for the most comprehensive approach to addictions and related issues. This model incorporates many of the treatment options outlined above to help teens achieve lasting change in terms of both behavior and overall physical and emotional well-being.

SUBSTANCE USE OR ABUSE IN YOUNG ADULTS

While the process of maturing takes us from adolescents to young adults and finally to a mature adult, there are usually a few hiccups along the way. Experimenting with different substances is often seen as a behavioral rite of passage of finding one's own self and identity. However, there are young adults that this is not a temporary behavior or instance in their life, and a solidified problem has been planted and is growing.

Some people can use recreational or prescription drugs without ever experiencing negative consequences or addiction. For many young adults, substance abuse can cause problems at home, school, work and affect their relationships, often amplifying the feeling of isolation, helplessness, or shame.

WHY YOUNG ADULTS EXPERIMENT WITH DRUG USE

Young adults experiment with drugs for many different reasons. For many, drugs hold an element of curiosity especially during a time in their lives where many things are new. One of the main reasons of use is peer pressure and friends are participating in such activities. For many young adults it's a means to improving themselves. Athletes use drugs to improve their performance, or someone will use drugs to ease another problem, such as stress, anxiety, or depression. Use does not automatically lead to

abuse, and there is no specific level at which substance use moves from casual to problematic. It varies by individual.

If substance use is causing problems in someone's life—at work, school, home, or in their relationships—they likely have a substance abuse or addiction problem.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF SUBSTANCE USE AND ABUSE

Different substances and drugs have different physical effects, but the symptoms of abuse are often similar. Here are common signs and symptoms of substance use and abuse:

- Neglecting responsibilities – Whether at school, work, or home, if responsibilities are being affected negatively, this can be a sign of substance abuse.
- Abusing drugs under dangerous conditions, or taking risks while under the influence – Driving while under the influence, using in unsanitary conditions, or having unprotected sex are all high risk behaviors of substance abuse.
- Legal trouble – Substance abuse can lead to problems with the law, or getting arrested for dangerous or destructive behavior.
- Relationship problems – While under the influence of drugs, fights with a partner or family member, colleagues, or friends may increase.

HOW TO HEAL FROM SUBSTANCE ABUSE

There are many beneficial programs and services available that can help and assist with young adults suffering from substance abuse. At Pacific Quest, we believe that one of the most successful means of defeating substance abuse is by disconnecting from the factors that lead someone to use.

At the Pacific Quest wilderness therapy program, we help young adults deal with the factors that have led to their abuse and that hold a grip over them. Our program allows young adults to disconnect from the technological world and distractions, and focus on themselves.

Nature can play a large role in one's recovery. Young adults that attend our program learn about responsibility through Organic Gardening and Horticultural Therapy. Our Sustainable Growth model incorporates many different principles to help young adults lead a healthy and rewarding life. We combine Individual and Group Therapy, a Wellness Program for physical health, a nutritional diet for healthy living, and proper exercise and sleep to maintain the body. All of this is combined into a single outdoor therapy program that empowers young adults and offers a sense of self and confidence.

If you feel your child, or another individual, could benefit from the Pacific Quest Wilderness Therapy Program or if you have a question about our therapeutic model, contact us at 808-937-5806 today.