



Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula®
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES
Clint Eastwood Youth Program



Could my child be experimenting with drugs?

A study reported by the Office of National Drug Control Policy showed that in 1999 more than half the students in the United States tried an illegal drug before graduating from high school. How can parents recognize the danger signs? We need to take an honest look at changes in a child's behavior. It is important to look at the big picture and not single changes. The teenage years are a time of dramatic transformation, and adolescents will react intensely to life's challenges each day. It's important to be attuned to patterns of changes that may signal a more serious problem. Here are some warning signs that indicate your child may be in trouble with drugs or alcohol:

- Your child develops friendships with people who are known to have alcohol or drug problems.
- You have "parents intuition" that there is alcohol or drug use.
- Your child has changes in grades or has school issues.
- You notice slurred speech or the smell of alcohol or marijuana.
- Your child has dilated pupils, frequent colds, or frequent runny noses.
- Your child displays significant changes in sleeping or eating habits.
- You see erratic or excessive mood swings, changes in habits, and a loss of interest in hobbies or other favorite activities.
- Your child becomes argumentative, easily angered, defensive, and/or hostile.
- Your child's lying to defend behavior becomes a habit.
- Money, alcohol, or drugs (over-the-counter drugs, illegal drugs, or drug paraphernalia) are missing from your home or are found hidden in your home.
- Your child has legal problems due to drug or alcohol use or possession.

What should I do if I suspect my child is experimenting with drugs or alcohol?

Even when the signs are clear, it can be difficult to admit that your child may be using alcohol or drugs. But the earlier a problem is identified and addressed, the more likely treatment can be successful. Remember, you can't control your child's reactions, but you can control how you discuss your concerns. Be straightforward, honest but not accusatory, and open to listening to your child.

Here are some tips:

- Choose a time when your child is able to sit down and have an honest conversation. Realize your child will try to avoid this talk. Be firm.
- Start by letting your child know what you have observed. Stick to the facts.
- Avoid assumptions. Describe what you have seen and heard in a matter-of-fact manner.
- Avoid using words that trigger strong reactions such as “you always . . .” or “I’m fed up with . . .” Instead, use an approach such as “you have been angry a lot and I’m really concerned about that.”
- Be patient. Give your child an opportunity to talk and respond.
- Give your child an opportunity to talk about the pressures and demands that may contribute to his/her taking drugs. But don't accept that drugs are the answer to those pressures.
- Start your talk with clear ideas of what you will expect of your child if you confirm there is a problem. For instance, you might insist on going for an assessment with a professional.

This information is brought to you by Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula's Clint Eastwood Youth Program, providing a structured program to treat drug and alcohol abuse as well as mental health problems.

**For more information or to schedule a free screening, please call
(831) 373-0924 or (800) 528-8080.**



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