

Don't Lose a Friend to Drugs

Has a friend become moody, short-tempered, and hostile? Does he or she seem out of it or spacey? Is she suddenly cutting classes and hanging out with the "wrong crowd?" Stop and think about it. Your friend may have an alcohol or other drug problem.



Additional Signs of Drug or Alcohol Abuse Include

- increased interest in alcohol or other drugs; talking about them, talking about buying them
- owning drug paraphernalia such as pipes, hypodermic needles, or rolling papers
- having large amounts of cash or always being low on cash
- drastic increase or decrease in weight
- sometimes slurred or incoherent speech
- withdrawal from others, frequent lying, depression, paranoia
- dropping out of school activities
- increased sexual activity.

If a friend acts this way, it is not a guarantee that he or she has an alcohol or other drug problem. You need to compare behavior now to behavior in the past. But it's better to say something and be wrong than to say nothing and find out later that you were right to be worried.

How To Talk to a Friend Who's in Trouble

It is not an easy thing to do. You may feel like your friend will think you are judging him or her. A friend in trouble may very well get mad at you for interfering in his or her business. Although it's not your job to get people to stop using drugs, you can and should express concern as a friend. Only the user can decide to stop. Before you talk to a friend, it may be helpful to know some of facts about drug use.

- There are an estimated 1.5 million Americans, ages 12 and older who use cocaine.
- Drug-related deaths remain near historic highs.
- Current illicit drug use among 8th and 10th graders has more than doubled in the past five years.
- Teens who drink alcohol are 7.5 times more likely to use any illicit drug, and 50 times more likely to use cocaine than young people who never drink alcohol.

Think ahead about what you want to say. These tips can help you through the process:

- Let the friend know that you care about them.
- Plan ahead what you want to say and how you want to say it.
- Pick a quiet and private time to talk.
- Don't try to talk about the problem when your friend is drunk or high.
- Use a calm voice and don't get into an argument.
- Ask if there is anything that you can do to help. Have information about local hotlines and drug abuse counseling and offer to go with him or her.

- Don't expect your friend to like what you're saying. But stick with it — the more people who express concern, the better the chances of your friend getting help.
- Look for help for your friend. Talk about the situation with someone who knows about drug abuse and helping abusers.
- Seek advice from a trusted adult such as a guidance counselor, a teacher, a religious leader or a parent about how to talk to friends who may have a drug problem.
- Be prepared for denial by the friend when you talk to him or her about his or her problem. The user may automatically turn aggressive and defensive.

Keeping Yourself Drug Free Helps Friends Stay That Way

- Skip parties where you know there will be alcohol or other drugs.
- Hang out with friends who don't use alcohol or other drugs to have fun.
- Get involved in drug-free activities. Ask your friends to join.
- Learn how to talk to your peers and younger kids about the dangers of abusing drugs and alcohol. Many communities have programs that teach teens how to counsel their peers about problems that teenagers face, including substance abuse.
- Don't accept a ride from someone who has been drinking or doing drugs. Find someone else to give you a lift.
- Offer to drive for the person who is high or drunk or call your parents or a friend for a ride.
- Remind friends that buying or possessing illegal drugs is against the law. Being arrested and getting a police record may not seem like a big deal now, but could keep you from getting jobs, college loans, or licenses for many professions.
- Remind friends that using intravenous drugs places them at risk of getting AIDS and hepatitis.

Take Action

- Encourage your school to organize drug-free activities — dances, movies, community service projects, walk-athons, marathons, etc. — to raise money for charities or local substance abuse programs.
- Use plays, songs, and raps to show younger children the consequences of drug abuse.
- Urge your school, faith community, or neighborhood to organize an anti-drug rally.
- Tell a teacher, your parents, or the police about drug dealers in your school and community. Many areas have phone numbers that let people report these crimes anonymously. Don't ignore the problem by thinking, "that kid will graduate next year" or "they only deal to a few kids." The problem will only get worse.
- Talk to school counselors about starting an alcohol or other drug abuse prevention program.
- Check with recreation centers, youth clubs, libraries, or schools to see if they offer after-school activities — classes for you and your friends. Ask your school or neighborhood to publicize these activities.
- Encourage your school to start intramural sports for kids who may not be interested in competing on the junior varsity or varsity athletic teams but still want to play.