

## PARENTAL RESPONSES TO STAGES OF ADOLESCENT DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE

### **Experimentation**

Curiosity is a part of adolescence.

Occasional beer drinking, marijuana smoking, or use of inhalants.

Often unplanned.

Usually done on weekends/during summer, mostly with friends.

Low tolerance (easy to get high).

Thrill of acting grown up and defying parents.

Little use of “harder” drugs.

### **What Parents Can Do:**

Set firm limits and expectations.

Give consequences.

Keep a closer eye on your teen and monitor their activities.

Continue discussions about your disapproval of use among teens.

Require teen to research problems associated with use of drugs and alcohol.

### **Regular Use**

Tolerance increases with increased use.

More parties involving alcohol and marijuana.

More money spent. Use of false ID's. Alcohol and marijuana bought and shared with friends.

Acceptance of the idea that “everyone does it” and wanting to be in on it.

Consumption increases and pride in being able to “handle it” increases (e.g. binge drinking).

Willing to suffer hangovers from alcohol use.

Blackouts from alcohol use may begin.

Often planned and the next high anticipated.

Introduction of other drugs (ecstasy, LSD, mushrooms, cocaine, speed).

Parents become aware of use.

Drug using friends may be kept from parents.

Lying to parents about extent of use and money used for drugs.

Decreased interest in school activities, grades will drop, truancy increases.

More time spent away from home, staying out later, or not coming home.

**What Parents Can Do:**

More serious consequences for continued use.

Restrict activities to ones with more adult supervision.

Consult a professional familiar with adolescents and substance use.

Attend (with teen) a Drug Education program or short term, outpatient program.

**Abuse**

Increase in number of times each week getting high and in amount of money spent.

“Social use” decreases---getting loaded rather than just high. Being high becomes normal. Most activities include using.

Non-using friends dropped.

Solitary use increases.

Arrests, caught at school, possible dealing.

May try to cut down or quit to convince self that there is no problem.

**What Parents Can Do:**

Get an evaluation at an intensive outpatient or inpatient treatment program.

Consider treatment options and available resources.

Attend parent support groups for parents of using teens (e.g. Al-anon, Naranon) and learn about co-dependency issues.

**Dependency/Addiction**

Continued use in spite of negative consequences.

Getting high during school or work.

Increased possibility of arrests, school suspensions/expulsions.

Physical condition worsens. Loss of weight, more frequent illness, memory suffers, flashbacks may increase. Thoughts of suicide may increase.

Difficult to face the day without the use of drugs or alcohol.

Can't tell what normal behavior is anymore. Normal means being stoned nearly constantly.

Low self-image and self-hate.

Denial of the problem.

Loss of control over use.

**What Parents Can Do:**

If your teen is not already in a treatment program, get them into one.

Attend parent support groups (e.g. Al-anon, Naranon) and work on your own co-dependency issues.

Take care of yourself through the process.

### Two Alarming Facts About Teen Use of Drugs/Alcohol

1. While adults also move through the stages of use described, it can take 10 or more years for an addiction to develop. Adolescents can move through the stages to Abuse or Addiction in less than two years.
2. The younger teens begin using drugs or alcohol, the more likely they will have a problem or an addiction to drugs or alcohol.

### Cautionary Note For Parents

Denial can be a strong defense that parents use when faced with an alcohol or drug using teen. Parents frequently appear surprised when they learn about their son/daughter's use, even when the signs and symptoms were highly evident. When parents are asked to assess the stage of use their teen is in, many parents rate their teen at a less severe or serious stage of use than the teen themselves will.