Drug Testing

Should parents drug test their teens at home? Not all experts agree on this issue. The American Academy of Pediatrics encourages concerned parents to consult a health professional rather than rely on home drug-testing products. Parents should weigh the risks and benefits before deciding what is best for their family.

Potential Benefits
- May lead to timely intervention and treatment.
- May help teens refuse drugs by providing an excuse to resist peer pressure, although there's no evidence that it actually keeps kids away from drugs.

Potential Risks
- May harm the parent-child relationship by creating resentment, distrust, and suspicion.
- May cause teens to switch from less dangerous drugs (e.g., marijuana) to those that pose greater danger (e.g., inhalants), but are not detected by screening.
- Drug tests are not always reliable.
- May give a false sense of security:
  - Window of detection for most drugs is 72 hours or less.
  - Most drug-involved youth know how to defeat drug tests.
  - Test may not detect frequently abused substances (e.g., alcohol, inhalants) or the latest fad (e.g., spice). See emerging issues.
  - Even adolescents with serious drug problems may have negative test results on most occasions.

(AAP)

Drug tests can be complex
- Unless proper procedures are used in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting laboratory testing for drugs, there is a substantial risk for error.
- Positive test results should be confirmed by the laboratory because certain foods, supplements or medications (e.g., pseudoephedrine) can cause a false-positive.
- Drug testing should not be a stand-alone response to a drug problem; it should be part of a broader prevention, intervention and treatment program.

Results of a positive drug test should not be used merely to punish. Drug and alcohol use can lead to addiction, and punishment alone may not necessarily halt this progression.

Read more:
- Testing Your Teen for Drugs
- A Review of Internet-Based Home Drug-Testing Products for Parents
- Drug Testing in Schools

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