Teens at Risk

_There’s always going to be a risk with teenagers. They make bad decisions._

Some reasons teens try tobacco, drugs and alcohol are curiosity, thrill-seeking, feeling invincible, insecurity, peer influence and to improve athletic or cognitive performance. (NIDA)

_Because teens’ brains are still developing in the areas that govern decision-making, judgment, and self-control, they are especially prone to risk-taking behaviors._ (NIDA)

_Did you know?_
- Nicotine exposure at an early age causes complex changes in the brain that make teens more vulnerable to alcohol abuse, and marijuana, cocaine and heroin use.
- Parents often miss signs of serious trouble because they think it’s "just alcohol."
- Young people believe that prescriptions are safe because a doctor prescribed them.
- Marijuana potency has increased exponentially in the last 20 years.
- Many designer drugs are available today that did not exist 20 or 30 years ago. (ASK) (CASA)

Risk Factors for Teen Substance Abuse
- Family history of alcohol or drug abuse
- Physical or sexual abuse
- Low supervision, inconsistent or severe discipline, unclear limit setting
- Family with poor communication patterns, frequent conflicts
- Drug availability
- Poverty
- Perception of low risk
- Early aggressive behavior, lack of impulse control, emotional instability
- Mental health problems (e.g., ADHD, conduct disorder, depression or anxiety)
- Low self esteem, loneliness, social rejection
- Academic difficulty, learning problems
(CASA) (MAYO) (NIDA)

_Suspect Your Teen Is Using Drugs or Drinking?_

_Warning Signs of Teen Substance Abuse_
- _Physical:_ fatigue, repeated health complaints, red and glazed eyes, and a lasting cough.
• **Emotional:** personality change, sudden mood changes, irritability, irresponsible behavior, low self-esteem, poor judgment, depression, and a general lack of interest.
• **Family:** starting arguments, breaking rules, or withdrawing from the family.
• **School:** decreased interest, negative attitude, drop in grades, many absences, truancy, and discipline problems.
• **Social problems:** new friends who are less interested in standard home and school activities, problems with the law, and changes to controversial dress and music (AACPA)

**Note:** Some of these behaviors could be caused by other problems (e.g., stress or depression). Regardless of the cause, when such behaviors persist, an evaluation by a trained professional may prevent further problems.