

How....When and What to be Suspicious of....drug use by your child

Other than possession of drugs and drug paraphernalia any of the “signs” below could have other explanations, reasonable explanations. The list is to increase your suspicion of any type of problem including drug use. The more suspicious you are the more involved you need to be. The more suspicion the less right to privacy your child has. Your job as a parent is to do your best to get them to adulthood alive. A violation of privacy has to be a last resort as there is a lot to lose. **BUT**, keeping your child alive is the first priority. If to do this you must violate privacy and search a room, then you must violate their privacy. Remember: Privacy is a right earned only by responsible, nothing-to-hide behavior. It is not a birth right.

1. **Drugs:** marijuana looks like the herb oregano. Cocaine and heroin are white powders. Be suspicious of any substance you cannot readily identify as a normal household item. Most often they are distributed in plastic bags, like Baggies.
2. **Paraphernalia:** these are the items used to help deliver the drug into the body. Rolling papers are used to roll either cigarettes or joints (marijuana cigarettes.) Small pipes of brass or glass or a pipe with a foil liner in the bowl are used to smoke marijuana or hash, which is a stronger form of marijuana. Razor blades are used to divide the powdered cocaine into lines to be snorted. Some use small spoons to hold the cocaine below the nostril to be snorted. Bongs, water pipes, are used also used to smoke drugs. All the above are readily available on the Internet.
3. **A sudden change in behavior:** children who start using drugs have a change in attitude, circle of friends, drop in school performance. Drugs effect motivation, not to the good. Children who use start to surround themselves with like-minded friends, friends who support their interest in drugs and can be a source of supply, thus spending less time with the “familiar” peers. Cocaine dramatically interferes with academic and social performance. Marijuana use leads to difficulty retaining information.
4. **Eye wash:** users often have red eyes from the effects of the drugs. They use eye drops to cover-up the redness.
5. **Mouth wash, breath fresheners:** these also accompany and interest in the opposite sex, but then they are used before the teen leaves the house. Users use these before they come home so you will not smell residuals on their breath.
6. **Incense, air fresheners:** these too can be just a thing they have discovered. They can be used to mask room odors they do not want you to notice: sweat socks, 2 week old food, marijuana, alcohol...
7. **Change in “normal” routine:** change in weight, appetite (e.g., a craving for sweets). Change in sleep habits. Truancy; school refusal. Mood fluctuation, at times moods that don not seem to fit the circumstances, silly and giggly at the wrong times. Depression. Hostility and defiance, violation of curfews, .
8. **Decline in personal care:** decrease in pride re: personal appearance. Poor personal hygiene and grooming.

9. **Anger outbursts:** this is pretty typical in the teen years without drug usage. Notice severity, frequency and in combination with other signs.
10. **Secrecy:** teens like privacy and being alone for long periods of time, when they cannot be with their friends. But when they act like they have something to hide, are too worried about you entering their room when they are not home, whisper on the phone while appearing nervous, warning flags should go up.
11. **Things disappearing or appearing:** money or other items “turn up missing;” your child has items they cannot afford. Drugs are expensive and must be financed by some means. Drugs can also be a source of income if the teen decides to sell them; this enables them to buy items they normally could not afford.
12. **Concerts:** in and of themselves, they are probably not a problem. Drug usage is common at many and this should prompt a discussion of warning and parental expectations of their child’s behavior. What may be of greater concern is who are the peers accompanying them to the concert. They may be the source of peer pressure to abuse drugs.

REMEMBER: these are warning signs which may also have reasonable explanations. Be observant, collect the data that makes you suspicious and then talk with a professional. You are not in this alone.

For further information:

<http://www.nida.nih.gov/Infofax/marijuana.html>

<http://www.nida.nih.gov/MarijBroch/Marijteens.html>

<http://www.nida.nih.gov/Infofax/cocaine.html>

Local police

Gateway Rehabilitation Institute