



Phoenix House
Rising Above Addiction

Talking To Your Kids - When Your Teen Is In Trouble

Maybe another teen's parent has called you, or maybe you've heard others talking. Maybe you've found drug paraphernalia or empty bottles in your teen's room or bag again. Maybe your teen has come home drunk or high once too often. It's time to take action. But what should you do?

Don't Wait

While initial alcohol and other drug use may be a voluntary decision, as use progresses, it becomes less and less of a choice. Addiction is a chronic brain disease, and parents should never shy away from getting their child help as early as possible. You don't ignore other health problems — like a sore throat that might be strep or a sore ankle that could be sprained. Given the potential consequences of addiction, signs of substance use and abuse should be addressed aggressively and early on.

Talk To Others

Let your own social network know what is going on. Chances are, someone will help you connect with someone else who has “been there and done that.” That parent may have some recommendations about where you can get help or suggestions for what to do next. By being open about your family situation, you are giving your teen a clear message that this is a health problem, and not an embarrassment.

Confirm Your Suspicions

Adolescence is a time of many changes — physical and emotional. Sometimes, behaviors or physical changes that seem like substance use or abuse can actually be symptoms of a medical or psychiatric problem. You need to confirm what is going on.

- Give your teen a drug test. For most drugs, this will let you know if your son or daughter has been using in the past couple of days. For alcohol, however, it will only let you know if your kid has been drinking alcohol very recently. Also, drug tests don't give you information about how often your teen uses, or how much.
- Seek out an assessment by a professional. Assessments are typically conducted by a medical or mental health professional or substance abuse counselor. During an assessment, the professional will ask your teen questions about his or her life, substance use and abuse, friends, activities, and other issues. After talking with your teen, the

professional will be able to make some suggestions about the next steps you can take to continue protecting your teen's well-being.

Involvement Others

Consider letting your teen's school know what is going on, especially if you think your son or daughter will not be penalized. The school is likely to recommend places for treatment. They may also help connect you with other parents struggling with the same issue. Additionally, school counselors may be able to provide extra assistance or support to your teen.

Don't Assume It Will Just Stop

Some professionals believe that a small portion of young adults "mature out" of their problematic substance use and abuse, but this is rare. Don't assume that your teen will fall into this minority — while you are waiting for your teen to "mature out," they may suffer terrible consequences from their substance use or abuse. You should seek help immediately.

Learn About Your Options

It pays to be educated and prepared, so that if you need to act quickly later, you won't have to deal with research.

- Check out programs you think might match your teen's needs. Ask for tours. Meet other teens in the programs.
- Look at program websites, and talk to others who might know more about these options.
- Be financially aware. If you have insurance, find out what kind of services your teen can access. Look into co-payments and deductibles. Find out which programs offer state assistance for copayments, and which programs offer sliding fee scales.

Don't Beat Yourself Up!

As parents, you usually know if something doesn't feel right—it's that feeling that has gotten you this far in identifying and acknowledging that you want help for your child. Many parents begin to question what they might have done wrong, or what they could have done differently. Let the professionals help you work through these normal feelings. Phoenix House provides residential and outpatient, assessment and treatment services for teens.

For more information call 1800 DRUG HELP.

www.phoenixhouse.org