

Youth, Depression and Alcohol and Drug Use

Young people sometimes turn to alcohol and drugs to cope with life's frustrations, to feel more adult-like, to fit in, to rebel or to satisfy their curiosity about drugs and drinking. Teens with depression or other mental health problems are particularly vulnerable to alcohol and drug use.

Many adolescents fail to recognize that they are depressed and why they are depressed. But, when they drink alcohol or take drugs to alleviate their stress or emotional pain, they can develop or worsen depression.

Alcohol is a drug, with serious risks and potentially harmful consequences. Marijuana and other drugs are also dangerous and often addictive. Casual use of drugs such as club drugs, inhalants and steroids can cause long-lasting brain damage and impair health.

Signs of adolescent alcohol and drug use

- getting drunk or high on drugs on a regular basis
- lying about alcohol or other drug use
- avoiding others to get drunk or high
- giving up activities once enjoyed to drink or use drugs
- planning drinking in advance, hiding alcohol or drinking or using drugs alone
- having to drink more to get the same high
- drinking and driving
- believing that to have fun, drinking or drug use is necessary
- experiencing frequent hangovers
- blacking out
- pressuring others to drink or use drugs
- taking risks, including sexual risks
- becoming victims to perpetrators of violence
- feeling run-down, hopeless, depressed or even suicidal
- acting selfish and not caring about others
- talking excessively about drinking or using drugs
- getting in trouble with the law
- getting suspended from school for an alcohol- or other drug-related incident

Consequences of adolescent alcohol and drug use

Behavioral and physical changes and life consequences associated with drug and alcohol use can include:

- difficulty concentrating
- personality changes
- general lack of motivation and energy
- sleep disturbances
- appetite changes
- oversensitivity
- moodiness
- nervousness
- having unplanned and unprotected sex
- declining grades and school failure
- depression
- loss of interest in family and friends
- excessive need for privacy; secretive or suspicious behavior

- suffering serious injuries from driving under the influence or engaging in other risky behavior

Help is available

It is important to get help for alcohol and drug problems early, because the longer someone waits to get help, the harder it is to get better.

Adolescents who use alcohol or other drugs should be screened for depression, anxiety disorders and for the severity of their substance abuse problem. When appropriate, they should be referred to education or support groups, or for counseling.

Adolescents who feel that they, or one of their friends, may have alcohol or other drug problems should confide in a trusted adult such as a teacher, parent, friend's parent or other caring individual. Also, most middle and high schools have student assistance and counseling services. School nurses, youth ministers and community youth workers are also excellent sources of information and help.

Resources

National Mental Health Association

www.nmha.org

(800) 969-NMHA

(800) DRUGHELP

This 24-hour hotline provides confidential answers to questions or information about community resources.

www.drughelp.org.

Alcoholics Anonymous

www.aa.org

(212) 870-3400

National Institute on Drug Abuse

www.nida.nih.gov

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information

www.health.org

www.clubdrugs.org

(301) 443-1124

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence

www.ncadd.org

(888) NCA-CALL

Source: National Mental Health Association