

Is your teen drug dependent? Would you even know?

Teens and drugs is certainly not a new issue and in fact many parents will admit to drug use in their teenage years. As such, some parents are less able to recognize drug dependency in their teens, confusing it for perhaps their own “experimental” drug use.

While it is certainly common for teens to “experiment” or through curiosity, simply desire to find out what being “high” feels like, there are some teens who are at risk for developing drug dependencies – a reliance on drugs to maintain a sense of well-being. Drug dependency though, can lead to poor school performance, conflict with family, friends and within the community and conflict with the law. Teens who are drug dependent are at risk for less achievement socially and economically as adults.

Generally, teens at risk for drug dependency share several factors. They may have low self-esteem, poor relationships with parents or siblings and poor school performance. There may also be family difficulties such as the death of a close or extended family member or the separation or divorce of parents. While prolonged “experimentation” alone can lead to drug dependency, if drug use coincides with these factors, there can be an increased risk for developing a drug dependency. Facing turmoil in one’s personal life at a time when trying illicit drugs can minimize the emotional pain of the situation and thus increase the desirability of the drug. Ongoing drug use lends the user to then associate with other similar drug users where drug use is normalized, accepted and encouraged by the group.

Is your teen drug dependent? Consider these warning signs:

- Stressors as noted above.
- Change in peer group.
- Decrease in school performance.
- Staying out late at night.
- Breaking house rules.
- Secretive behaviour.
- Fatigue, lethargy, apathy – lack of motivation.

- May admit to some drug use, but rationalizes and “enjoys” it.
- Adamantly denies drug use in a manner disproportionate to the question.

Normal healthy teens may show a few of these signs anyways, but a drug dependent youth will show several signs. If you suspect your teen may be drug dependent, you should take action including:

- Talk to your teen about your concerns (if non-responsive, you talk – they listen).
- Although controversial, consider searching their room for drugs and drug paraphernalia (destroy if found).
- Set curfews, limits on behaviour, and reasonable expectations for appropriate performance.
- Look to engage your teen in activities that are fun and incompatible with drug use.
- Consider attending counselling *with* your teen.
- Consult your physician.

If your teen is drug dependent, by definition, they are out of control. It will be necessary for you to take control in the short turn at least to help them overcome their dependency. Never fall into the trap of denying their problem because it is too difficult for you to admit! A drug dependent teen can use clean and sober parents for support and direction.

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Buy the book:

To order Direnfeld's book, *Raising Kids Without Raising Cane*, send a cheque or money order in the amount of \$12.00 to:

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