



Is my child using alcohol or other drugs?



It can sometimes be difficult to know if your child is using alcohol or other drugs. Parents may worry that their child is involved with alcohol or other drugs if he or she becomes withdrawn or negative, but these behaviours are common for young people going through challenging times. So it's important not to accuse your child unfairly and try to find out why your child's behaviour has changed. You also need to tell your child that you are concerned about them.

It's important to remember that drugs can include more than illegal drugs. Young people can also have problems with medicines a doctor prescribes or medicines they can buy over-the-counter at the chemist.

Look for a pattern or a number of changes in appearance, behaviour and attitude, not just one or two of the changes listed here.

Change in appearance

- Less attention paid to dressing and grooming
- Loss of appetite or unexplained weight loss
- Red and glassy eyes and frequent use of eye drops and breath mints

Change in behaviour

- Decreased attendance and performance at school
- Loss of interest in school, sports, or other activities
- Newly developed secrecy, or deceptive or sneaky behaviour
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- New friends, and reluctance to introduce them
- Lying or stealing

Change in attitude

- Disrespectful behaviour
- A mood or attitude that is getting worse
- Lack of concern about the future

What should you do if you find out that your child is using alcohol or other drugs?

If you think that your child is using alcohol or drugs, one of the most important things you can do is to talk honestly and openly with him or her, the same as you would any other health issue.

This may be a hard conversation so try to not use harsh, judging words and be supportive. Let your child know that you were his or her age once and that you understand how hard it can be to say 'no' when someone offers alcohol or other drugs.

When talking with your child about alcohol or drug use:

- **Ask about use.** Find out what substances your child has tried, what effects the substances had, and how he or she feels about substance use. Listen carefully to what your child liked about using the substance and why.
- **Share concerns.** Talk about your concerns, not only about your child's alcohol or drug use but also about other problems that may be going on, such as problems at school or with friends.
- **Review expectations.** Talk with your child about family rules concerning substance use and what might happen when rules are broken.

If you think your child may have a substance use problem, talk with your doctor or your local Community Alcohol and Drug Service to find out what resources are available in your area that can help your child manage his or her alcohol or drug problem.

Alcohol and Drug Support Line

Phone: (08) 9442 5000 or

Country callers: 1800 198 024

Email: alcoholdrugsupport@mhc.wa.gov.au

Any drug has the potential to cause harm.