

MANITOBA ADDICTIONS AWARENESS WEEK

Topic: Early signs that may indicate an alcohol/drug problem

Audience: Parents and Caregivers

Early signs that may indicate an alcohol/drug problem

While illegal drug use cannot be condoned, curiosity and risk-taking are part of development, and may lead young people to experiment with drugs. If your child becomes involved, your reaction is important. Merely riding out the drug use is no help, nor is exiting from your child's life.

Warning Signs

How can you tell if your kids may be harmfully involved with other drugs? No one symptom is conclusive, but several can start the red lights flashing. You should be careful here, as each of them may indicate other, non-drug problems common to teenagers. Some of these warning signs include:

- **Changes in school performance** (lower grades, frequent tardiness and absenteeism, falling asleep in class, and discipline problems).
- **Changes in physical appearance** (red eyes, less cleanliness, and general deterioration).
- **Changes in eating or sleeping habits** (insomnia, napping at inappropriate times, weight loss, or sudden increase or decrease in appetite).
- **Changes in friends** (new or different friends who are very different in appearance, behaviour and goals).
- **Changes in behaviour** (moodiness, depression, hostility, hypersensitivity, loss of interest in previous hobbies and activities, familiarity with drug culture and hangouts, and lying).
- **Finding drug paraphernalia** (e.g. pipes, burnt knives, syringes; strange odours or cover-up odours).

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Dealing with problems

If you become aware of drug use, stop and think carefully. How you react and deal with it is very important. Consider these steps:

- **Prepare your approach** – Plan your discussion and wait until you are calm, and for an appropriate moment to do so. If your teen is under the influence, it's best to wait until the effects wear off.
- **Address the problem** – Begin by calmly, but firmly expressing your awareness of the drug use and your concern. Ask how your teen feels about it. Reject the behaviour, not the child. Deal with the real point of the conflict.
- **Respect the consequences** – If the established rules have been violated, proceed with the prearranged consequences or allow natural consequences to happen. Ensure that the consequences are logically linked to drug use.

Choices made with knowledge of the consequences pave the way to responsibility. Seeing that kids should be held responsible for their actions, they should justify any unauthorized absences from school or poor grades; pay or work off their own debts, and otherwise make good any loss that they caused, to the extent possible.

For additional support and information contact your local Addictions Foundation of Manitoba office or Employee Assistance Representative.

Adapted with permission from "Two-Way Street: Parents, Kids & Drugs". Royal Canadian Mounted Police and AADAC, 1992.