Tips to Spot Substance Use

Kids are cautious in using drugs at school

Kids can be pretty stealthy when it comes to bringing drugs to school, using drugs in school or being under the influence at school. Here are some signs and symptoms of possible adolescent use.

Early signs predicting substance use:

Behaviors

- The earliest signs predicting substance use are a change in behaviors and mannerisms.
- First sign is a change in friends. The change may be gradual or sudden.
- Teens may withdraw from social bonding opportunities and activities.
- They prefer to be left alone and may stop doing what they are passionate about.
- Watch for teens who may choose to be alienated, especially if social; listen to how they talk about realtionships with family and friends and if they refer to deteriorating relationships.

Additional signs

- Decline of academic performance
- Chronically late to school, skip class, fall asleep in class or appear distracted
- Marijuana tends to affect GPA more than alcohol. Marijuana may be consumed during the week where alcohol is consumed on weekends
- Teens make up unsatisfactory excuses or are angry when confronted
- Teens using substances often interpret correction as disrespectful and violation of rights
- Opposing authority is a purpose to keep using
- Some teens are savvy enough to invent situations to effectively mask their problems
- Mood swings are common with adolescent use. Some may become moody either becoming angry and argumentative or burst into tears.

Obvious signs:

- Bloodshot eyes, pinpricks on the arms or possessing drug paraphernalia
- Bloodshot eyes are sign of marijuana use
- Pin-point pupils could indicate heroin use
- Dilated pupils may indicate use of cocaine, hallucinogens or amphetamines
- Students that suddenly possess money might be selling items to earn money for drugs or are selling drugs.
- Watch for things missing or reports of stolen items

Hiding substances at school

- Kids have been found with homemade bongs from soda cans and apples
- Be on the lookout for pop cans with small pinpricks that might be used as a bong
- Watch for display of typical items such as foil wrappers, square folded envelopes, balloons, ziplock bags or mirrors that seem innocent enough for multiple purposes
- Drugs can be hidden in Crayola markers, tampon cases, travel-sized lotion bottles, hairbrushes, electronic battery compartments, under shoe pads in tennis shoes and even tennis balls.
- Virtual students have a bit more freedom to move off camera and hit a vape. The more interactive the teacher is with student, the less the student can use.

Helpful Resources for educators that want to address substance use in classroom:

- **https://www.operationprevention.com/classroom**
- **https://teens.drugabuse.gov/teachers**

Advice: If you come into contact with a teen that is using a substance talk with them openly. Avoid accusation, judgment and ridicule. Many can be convinced to stop when they feel the support of a caring adult.

C&A Child & Adolescent Behavioral Health

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