

Drug or Alcohol Use

Children who are using drugs or alcohol on a regular basis may go to great lengths to hide it from their parents.

Some children experiment with drugs or alcohol during adolescence, or even earlier. For some children, this behavior becomes a problem and interferes with their activities and health.

The following is a list of typical signs and symptoms that your child may be using drugs or alcohol. Your child may be using these substances if he or she:

- Is often tired and irritable
- Has red and glazed eyes
- Develops a persistent cough
- Shows a significant change in personality and mood
- Begins to behave irresponsibly
- Develops low self-esteem
- Exercises poor judgment
- Is depressed and has a general lack of interest in activities
- Starts arguments with family members more often
- Breaks parent rules
- Develops an overall negative attitude about school
- Is performing poorly at school and has increased absences
- Begins to have discipline problems at school
- Has friends who are not interested in school
- Begins to have problems with the law

Drug or alcohol use may also be a sign of other mental health issues. Some children use substances as a way to control mental health symptoms—a form of self-medicating without the use of (and sometimes the stigma of) prescription medications. Other children use substances because of a lack of self-esteem or because they do not feel like they fit in or are a part of their community. If you think that your child may have a problem with drugs or alcohol, you may need to think about other mental health issues as well.

Possible mental health diagnoses within this symptom cluster include:

- Anxiety Disorders (p48)
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) (p52)
- Bipolar Disorder (p59)
- Depression (p67)
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (p84)
- Substance Abuse and Dependence (p94)

TIP

Some children are at a higher risk for using drugs and alcohol because of a family history of these types of problems. If your child is at a higher risk for using drugs or alcohol, it is important that you talk to him or her about drugs and alcohol. It is also important to talk about drugs and alcohol with your children even if they are not high risk or do not show any signs or symptoms.