



FAST FACTS: Quick Reference Guide to Substance Use in Children & Adolescence

While it is no surprise that children and adolescents face peer pressure to experiment with drugs and alcohol, children who are adopted are at an increased risk for drug and alcohol use. Several factors impact a child's risk including genetics and history of trauma. As an adoptive parent, one must be ready to have the conversations with their child around substance use in a healthy and educational manner.

Why do kids experiment?

It is important to recognize that not all teens who experiment with drugs and/or alcohol are "bad" or "troubled" teens. There are several reasons teens begin to experiment with drugs and/or alcohol including boredom, coping with stress or other mental health symptoms (e.g., trauma, depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, social anxiety, etc.), family discord, out-of-home placement, fitting in with their friends or peer pressure, and curiosity.

Having a Conversation

The earlier you can have a conversation with your child about alcohol and drugs, the better! Educate your child on how alcohol and drugs effect the body. Talk about peer pressure and practice helping them say 'no' in a variety of situations. The following are topics that you may wish to incorporate into your conversation:

- Ask your child what they already know about drugs and alcohol. If they have acknowledged previous use, ask them why to help you understand their motives.
- Brain development – the brain doesn't stop growing until the mid-20s! This means drugs and alcohol can influence how our brain develops. Check out this website for additional information on brain development: <https://drugfree.org/article/brain-development-teen-behavior/>
 - Alcohol and drugs affect people differently. Possible short-term effects include impaired judgment, impaired vision and coordination, altered perceptions, etc. Possible long-term effects include medical issues (i.e., cirrhosis, pancreatitis), memory issues, addiction, etc.
- Alcohol and drugs are not healthy ways to cope with stress or other symptoms – the problems will still be there long after the substance has left our body. In fact, drugs and alcohol may increase mental health symptoms.



- If your child is experiencing mental health symptoms, connect them with a therapist who can provide them with a safe and supportive environment to learn healthy coping skills. The HELP staff at Foster Adopt Minnesota can provide you with a list of adoption and trauma competent professionals who can help!
- Tips for Resisting Peer Pressure: <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/post/resisting-peer-pressure>
- The following 'myths and facts' sheet may help you start the conversation with your child: https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/images/sma18-4299_-_thumbnail.jpg
- This link offers tips on how to have a conversation about alcohol with your college-bound child: <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Talking-With-Your-College-Bound-Young-Adult-About-Alcohol/sma18-4897>
- As with other important conversations, remain calm, keep an open mind, and offer acceptance. Developing open and honest communication is essential!

Warning Signs

The following are possible warning signs your child may be experimenting or abusing alcohol and drugs.

- History: family history of addiction, history of personal use, significant trauma history, or multiple out-of-home placements.
- Behavioral: changes in relationships with family, increased going out, increase in missed curfews, increased secrecy or lying, or other odd or unusual behaviors.
- Mood and Personality: mood swings, increased depression, more irritable, loss of motivation, and impulsivity.
- School/Work: not completing assignments, missing class or shifts, increased complaining about school or work, and loss of motivation or interest related to school/work/extracurricular activities.
- Health/Hygiene: changes to their appearance, increased sleep, headaches, or sudden weight loss or gain.
- Additional warning signs can be found at: <https://drugabuse.com/15-warning-signs-that-your-kid-may-be-using-drugs>.

Prevention is Key

Having a conversation with your child about substance use is important, but it's not the only thing you can do to help prevent future experimentation or use.

- If you are going to have alcohol in the house, model healthy alcohol use. This might mean teaching other ways to deal with stress (i.e., going for a walk or deep breathing), drinking in moderation, offering non-alcoholic beverages at parties, no drinking and driving, only drinking when of legal age, etc.
- Set and maintain family rules around drug and alcohol use.
- If not already, get your child involved in pro-social activities! Find groups, activities, or sports your child is interested in and stay engaged in the activities *with them*.
- Know where to get help. If you think your child is beyond experimentation, seek professional help. The HELP staff at Foster Adopt Minnesota can provide you with a list of professionals able to help.

Additional Resources on Substance Use

<http://sumn.org/>

<https://drugfree.org/>

<https://www.addictioncampuses.com/blog/addiction-and-adoption/>

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/teen/substance-abuse/Pages/default.aspx>

<https://truthinitiative.org/>

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To learn more about Foster Adopt Minnesota and our efforts to ensure each child will have a permanent family, call 612-861-7115 or visit www.fosteradoptmn.org.