



In 2018, the National Institute on Drug Abuse found that approximately 6.1 percent of all 8th graders, 9.6 percent of all 10th graders, and 12.4 percent of all 12th graders have used an illegal drug in the last year. Drug use may be higher among kids who have dropped out of school. One in four 12th graders report that regular marijuana use poses a great risk (26.7 percent). And, daily marijuana use continues to outpace daily cigarette use across grades, reflecting a steep decline in daily cigarette use and fairly stable daily marijuana use. After marijuana, prescription and over-the-counter medications account for most of the top drugs abused by 12th graders in the past year. Studies show that 30.2 percent of high school seniors have used alcohol in the past month. Alcohol use and binge drinking continued to show a significant five-year decline among all grades.

Other psychiatric disorders often coexist with substance use problems and need assessment and treatment. Adolescents who use drugs often act out, do poorly academically, and drop out of school. They are at risk for unplanned pregnancies, violence, and infectious diseases. As a teacher who spends a lot of time with kids, you can play a critical role in helping to identify and get help for those students at risk for or engaged in alcohol or drug use.

Why is this important?

Drugs and alcohol contribute to a host of problems for our children including:

- Poor academic performance
- Memory and learning problems
- Truancy and absenteeism
- Problems with family and peer relationships and a lack of empathy for others
- A tendency to engage in other risky activities and to feel invulnerable • An increased risk for moving on to more dangerous drugs and developing dependency, or addiction

While all children are at risk of using drugs and alcohol, the following risk factors significantly increase the chance that a child will develop a serious alcohol or drug problem:

- Having a family history of substance use, dependency or addiction
- Experiencing emotional or psychological problems
- Low self-esteem
- Not feeling connected to family, school, or community

What can educators do about it?

Research has documented that family involvement and classroom-based prevention programs are the most effective means of addressing substance use among youth.

- Watch for signs of substance use:
 - Moodiness or irritability
 - Argumentative, disruptive, rule-breaking behavior
 - Sudden mood or personality changes
 - Low self-esteem or depression x Poor judgment; irresponsible behavior
 - Social withdrawal; pulling away from family
 - Change in former activities or friends
 - General lack of interest
- Discuss the situation with the child's parents or caregiver.
- Notify the appropriate school staff (e.g., school counselor or mental health provider, school principal) if you suspect a student is using drugs or alcohol.
- Let your students know that you do not approve of drug or alcohol use. Develop a personal relationship with your students, and share your concerns about their safety and well-being.

- Create a positive classroom environment where students feel comfortable talking with you and sharing feelings. Listen carefully to what they are telling you, and let them know that you are a resource of support if they should need it.
- Encourage students to develop different ways to refuse substance use. Examples include:
 - Switching topic (“Hey, did you hear about the game last night?”)
 - Using an excuse (“I can’t, I’m meeting a friend in 10 minutes”)
 - Put the “blame” on others/parents (“My mom would kill me if she found out”)
 - Walk away
 - State the facts (“No thanks, I’ve read about what drugs can do to your body”)
- Educate yourself. Seek out resources that give current information regarding what drugs are out there and specific signs of use. Children are beginning to use at younger ages and teachers often spend more time with students than their parents. It is important to be up to date to ensure the safety of your students.
- Educate your students. Give them factual information about drugs and alcohol. It is important to challenge myths and to give them accurate information about the dangers of substance use.
- Remind your students that they will be reported if they come to school in possession of drugs or alcohol, or under the influence.
- Let your students know that you will contact their parents if you suspect drug or alcohol use. Follow through on parent contact should the need arise, but let students know that you will be contacting their parents so as not to violate their trust.
- Discuss your concerns and possible responses with your principal or other school administrators.

Resource Links

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

Provides links to facts on specific drugs.
<https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse>

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

Provides links to facts on specific drugs for parents and teachers as well as age appropriate curriculum regarding drug education.
<https://www.drugabuse.gov/parents-educators>

Monitoring the Future

An annual survey, under a grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse, of 8th, 10th, and 12th graders measuring drug, alcohol, and cigarette used and related attitudes nationwide.
<https://archives.drugabuse.gov/monitoring-future-survey-overview-findings-2013>

*Adapted from Resources found on:
www.schoolmentalhealth.org March 2009*



an initiative of



The Children’s Mental Health Matters Campaign, an initiative of the Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD), receives funding from the Maryland Department of Health – Behavioral Health Administration, the Maryland Family Network, and community sponsors. Together with the Maryland Coalition of Families, National Center for School Mental Health, MANSEF, and hundreds of community champions, we work to raise public awareness and acceptance of the importance of children’s mental health to overall child and family wellbeing. We are grateful to the National Center for School Mental Health for their collaboration in creating these resources for families.