



Now What?



**The support you need
when you need it.**

This brochure is for parents whose teen is experiencing some degree of a problem with alcohol or other drugs. First, please know you are not alone. Many parents are wrestling with the same concerns.

Once you have a chance to let this news settle and your child has sobered up, we suggest you act to both find out how serious the problem is and put some safeties in place at home to reduce risks. It is not a good idea to hope a child or teen will outgrow a substance use problem. If your child has initiated use, especially under the age of 18, it is best to act now because young brains are developmentally more prone to damage. It is now known the brain undergoes rapid development during the adolescent years making this a time for great learning. Unfortunately, some learning can be negative, in the form of lasting addictions.

This is why 90% of addictions have roots in the teen years. It takes a teen only months to develop a full blown addiction whereas it may take an adult years.



For this reason, intervening early and intervening well is very important. The longer you wait, the harder it may be to get your teen to respond. With early intervention, it is more likely that your teen can change the behavior before developing a lasting addiction. To help you gauge how big the problem is, consider your child's age. If they are 12 or younger, we suggest you seek immediate professional assistance. If they are closer to 17, the significance of the problem may be less clear. The type of drug being taken, as well as the amount and number of times used all play a part in how quickly addiction can develop. **To help assess this, consider these warning signs:**

- Has there been a change in their friend group?
- Is there a noticeable change in their behavior?
- Has there been a change in grades or attendance at school?
- Have you noticed a change in their sleeping patterns?
- Is there a change in their appearance?
- Is there a noticeable change in how much money your child seems to have?
- Have you smelled alcohol or marijuana on them? Along these same lines, are their eyes often dilated or bloodshot?

If after going through this list, you either feel your child has a problem or you are still questioning it, we suggest you contact Chestnut Health Systems for help assessing the problem. **The Chestnut Youth Case Management team can be reached by phone at 309-827-6026 or by email at teenhelp@chestnut.org.**

Regardless of how advanced the problem is, there are things we recommend all parents do to reduce risks. This starts with keeping the conversation open with your child, remembering your relationship is the key to helping them make positive decisions. At the same time, lock up or monitor your alcohol, over the counter medications (especially cough and cold medicines) and other prescription medications, including medical marijuana.

Because you can't go everywhere with your teen, being creative and consistent in how you check in before they go out and when they return must be a priority. [Here is a checklist to follow:](#)

Before they leave...

- Set a curfew and discuss the consequences if they were to break it.
- Ask them where they will be, what they plan to do, and whom they will be with.
- Ask what their plan is if alcohol is present.
- Tell them they can call you any time for help if they feel unsafe.
- Tell them to keep their cell phone with them and not to make any changes to the itinerary without first consulting you.
- Tell them they need to speak with you as soon as they come home, even if they have to wake you up!

Upon returning home...

- Either be awake or make sure your teen knows to wake you.
- Have a conversation with your teen to make sure they are coherent.
- Check for signs and smells of alcohol or drug use. (Some parents require their teen to kiss them on the cheek so they can get a good smell. Determine what works for your family!)
- Ask how the evening went and if there were any problems.
- Ask if there were drugs or alcohol present. If so, ask how that made him/her feel and what could be done next time to avoid the risk of problems.

And try these...

- Get to know all you can about your teen's friends, including their parents.
- Praise and reward good behavior.
- Follow through on consequences when rules are broken.
- Encourage your teen and his/her friends to have fun, without drinking or doing drugs, through other activities (sports, family, activities, hobbies, clubs, etc.)
- Eat dinner and have fun as a family.

Many of these ideas are good for any family, but may be especially needed if underage alcohol or other substance use is occurring.

For more specific suggestions about steps that may help your child or teen, please visit www.chestnut.org and www.BNParents.org.

When you talk to your teen about alcohol...

Parents **Make a Difference.**

bnparents.org