



Alcohol & Drug Disorders: A Guide for Families/Whānau

What is Normal Use?

Young people are likely to experiment with (& use at a low level) Alcohol & Cannabis in their teenage years but the majority learn to manage their use by the time they are adults. Because so many people in society use substances in a regular way, it can be difficult to know whether your teenager is at risk of developing problems or not.

Why do Alcohol & Drugs cause Difficulties?

How do I know if my Young Person's Drinking or Drug use is becoming a Problem?

It may be:

- Interfering with their performance at school or at work
- Leading to conflict & arguments within the family & with friends
- Making them come in close contact with criminal activity
- Making them feel nervous, depressed or agitated a lot of the time
- Making them lose touch with reality i.e. hearing or seeing things that others can't
- Becoming harder for them to achieve the same effect so they are upping the amount of alcohol or drugs they are taking to get drunk or high
- Beginning to happen more often during the day or when they are by themselves
- Becoming something they use to deal with stress or feeling upset or depressed
- Leading them into dangerous situations like riding with drunk drivers or putting physical safety at risk
- Leading them into situations where their health is at risk, like having unsafe sex.

When people use Alcohol & Drugs, it affects the way they think, feel & act so that they think & feel differently. Often this effect only lasts a short time & people continue to use, looking for that same feeling. This can lead to difficulties with addiction & mental as well as physical health. As well as causing damage to relationships & the risk of legal problems, Alcohol & Other Drugs can cause difficulties with education & put personal safety at risk.

How can I find out if my Young Person has an Alcohol & Drug Problem?

The **best way** for you to **find out** about any problems or potential problems is through **talking honestly** with your **young person**. Looking for '*signs*' or '*symptoms*' of alcohol or drug problems is generally unreliable & if it leads to false (or true) accusations, this may affect your relationship into the future. Be very careful about jumping to conclusions as accusations, whether true or false, are unlikely to improve communication with your young person.

If I suspect my young person has a problem, what should I do?

You will be in a better position to raise concerns with your young person if you have learned a little about the risks & effects of alcohol & drugs yourself. **Information** is readily **available** in the **community** & some **helpful websites** are provided below. Once you have some knowledge you will be in better position to discuss the issues with your young person. Generally the earlier that substance use problems are identified, the easier it is to do something about them.

Alcohol & Drug Information can be found on the following Sites:

www.cads.org.nz
(Auckland Based)

www.alcohol.org.nz

www.fade.org.nz

www.alcoholdrughelp.org.nz

www.welltrust.co.nz
(Wellington Based)

www.urge.co.nz
(youth Orientated Info)

Alcohol Drug Helpline: 0800 787797

Face to face support for you as family/whānau

www.cads.org.nz
(Auckland Based)

www.al-anon.org.nz

Many DHBs now provide support services to family/whānau supporting young people with drug & alcohol problems. Ring your local Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service to find out what is available.

How can I Improve Communication with my Young Person?

- Show** them you **care about** them, their **health & happiness**.
- Talk** to them about it in a **calm & non-judgmental** way.
- Ask** what they like about taking alcohol & drugs.
- Listen** carefully to what they say.
- Clarify **what substances** they are using, how often, where & when.
- Work together** on how to decrease or stop using substances for e.g. buddying up with friends, limiting spending money & taking taxi money.
- Be clear about what you **expect** from them.
- Don't** blame, scold or get angry.
- Look forward** to how things might be in the **future**.
- Call for **'time out'** if discussions get heated.
- Examine** your own substance use.
- Be mindful** of the fact that young people report that they obtain most of the alcohol that they drink from their parents.

What other Help is available in the Community for my Young Person?

- School Guidance Counsellors** can be approached to discuss any concerns.
- Your family **doctor** will help clarify if there is a problem or not & available treatment options in your area.
- Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service** or an **Alcohol & Drug Service**. In some areas there may be a specialist Alcohol & Drug Service for youth.
- Your local **Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)** or **Marijuana Anonymous (MA)** organisation may have groups for young people.
- Some areas have specialist **Residential Alcohol & Drug treatment programmes** which are best for those young people with severe addiction problems.