



# Children's Mental Health Matters!

## Facts for Educators Substance Abuse in Children and Adolescents

In 2005, the National Institute on Drug Abuse found that approximately 21 percent of all 8<sup>th</sup> graders, 38 percent of all 10<sup>th</sup> graders and 50 percent of all 12<sup>th</sup> graders have tried an illegal drug. Drug use may be higher among kids who have dropped out of school. Younger students are also at risk; surveys have shown that 30 percent of 4<sup>th</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> graders feel pressured by their peers to drink beer, 31 percent to try marijuana, and 34 percent to smoke cigarettes. Alcohol use often begins by age 13, and studies show that 80 percent of high school seniors have used alcohol. The younger kids start using drugs and alcohol, the more likely they are to develop serious problems with abuse and addiction later on. 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 abuse.

### Why do we care?

#### 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 abuse, dependency or addiction
- ✎ Depression or low self-esteem
- ✎ Social isolation; inability to fit into the mainstream

### What can we do about it?

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

#### ✎ Watch for signs of substance abuse:

- Moodiness or irritability
- Argumentative, disruptive, rule-breaking behavior
- Sudden mood or personality changes
- Low self esteem or depression
- 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")

# Facts for Educators

## *Substance Abuse in Children and Adolescents Continued*

-  **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 their 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.

age appropriate curriculum regarding drug education.  
<http://www.nida.nih.gov/parent-teacher.html>

National Council on Alcohol and Drug Dependence is particularly focused on alcohol use and abuse. For a list of specific signs that a student may be in trouble with alcohol: <http://www.ncadd.org/facts/parent2.html>

Safe and Drug Free Schools. Offers tips for parents on how to talk to their child about drug use and abuse, and how to prevent drug use. It also provides information about specific drugs and their effects.  
<http://www.yic.gov/drugfree/index.html>

**Adapted from Resources found on:  
[www.schoolmentalhealth.org](http://www.schoolmentalhealth.org) March 2009**

---

### Resources/Links

American Council for Drug Education

This is an excellent website for teachers who want suggestions for talking with their students about drugs and alcohol, information about signs and symptoms of specific drugs, and classroom prevention lesson plans:  
<http://www.acde.org/educate/Default.htm>

The AntiDrug.com, a website of the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, provides parents and caregivers with information on proven prevention strategies and information about what to do if you suspect that your adolescent is using drugs or alcohol:  
<http://www.theantidrug.com/ei/>

Building Blocks for a Healthy Future

A website developed by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) with practical information about helping your preschool and elementary school-aged children make good choices and develop a healthy lifestyle: <http://www.bblocks.samhsa.gov/Educators/>

Check Yourself — Includes detailed descriptions of drugs, alcohol myths vs. truths, and personal stories.  
<http://checkyourself.com>

National Institute on Drug Abuse: Provides links to facts on specific drugs for parents and teachers as well as