

S I G N S



S Y M P T O M S :

Friends often know about drug use before there are signs and symptoms that are visible to others.

- She is using regularly and has to use drugs or alcohol to have a good time or cope with everyday life.
- He uses drugs or drinks when he is alone.
- She has driven a car while high or drunk or has ridden with someone who was high or drunk.
- He starts hanging out with new friends who will do drugs with him or who can score drugs for him.
- He borrows money from you to buy drugs or alcohol, or asks you to hold his drugs for him.
- She shows up at school drunk or high or has skipped class to use.
- You feel like you must babysit her when she is drunk or high to keep her from doing things she might regret, like having sex or getting into a fight with her parents.
- He's broken plans with you, or showed up late, because he was getting drunk or high.
- She shows little interest or drops out altogether from activities she once enjoyed, like sports or music.
- He's having difficulty with family relationships and letting his family and friends down.

And if you see yourself doing some of these things, you may want to evaluate your own relationship with drugs and alcohol by going online at www.checkyourself.org.

W H E R E T O G E T

H E L P

For more information on drugs and addiction and for advice on how to talk to your friends about their drug and alcohol use, go to www.freevibe.com.

For more information or to talk to a specialist who can refer your friend to help, call **1-800-788-2800** or go to www.health.org.

For science-based facts about how drugs affect the brain and body, go to www.teens.drugabuse.gov.

If you are concerned about your own drug or alcohol use, go to www.checkyourself.org.

For information about underage drinking and alcohol problems, go to www.thecoolspot.gov.



S T E P U P

You've Got the Power to Help a Friend or Sibling Who Uses Drugs or Drinks

A Guide for Teens

D O N ' T
W A L K
A W A Y

So you think your friend or brother or sister has a problem with drugs or alcohol? Maybe he or she seems like a different person since starting to drink or get high. Maybe she's been letting you down because she's using drugs. Maybe you are seeing patterns in his drug or alcohol use and he seems to need drugs or alcohol before he goes out — to school or to a party. Or maybe some of the things he does when he is drunk or high are just scary. Whatever it is, the important thing is that you've noticed that your friend's drinking or drug use is trouble.

You can help your friend now — before something really bad happens. Your friend will probably insist that his or her drinking or drug use is not a big deal. This is very common among people with drug or alcohol problems. Don't let your friend's denial keep you from talking with him. If he continues to make bad decisions about drugs or alcohol, he could face consequences like getting caught or arrested, losing his driver's license, getting suspended, or more seriously, getting involved in a drug or alcohol-related car crash, overdosing or becoming addicted.



NO WAY TO
KNOW
WHAT WILL
HAPPEN

If a friend smokes marijuana or uses other drugs or alcohol, there is no way to predict how he or she will act or what will happen when he or she is drunk or high. All drugs, including marijuana, can be harmful and addictive. There is no magic number of

drug experiences it takes to become addicted. But drug and alcohol use can lead to abuse, and continued abuse can lead to addiction.

Common sense tells us that helping a friend address alcohol or drug use early can help them stop before they have a problem that gets out of control. This is why it is important to step up and talk with your friend sooner rather than later — you never know what consequences lie ahead if he or she continues to drink or do drugs.



THE
OF
POWER
FRIENDSHIP

HOW TO
START THE
CONVERSATION

If you decide to sit down with your friend and talk to him or her about his or her drinking or drug use, you may not know what to say. You may wonder how she will respond. Will he get defensive? Will she deny she has a problem? Will she get mad at you and tell you to mind your own business? It's likely that he or she will. People with drug or alcohol problems usually defend their use or make excuses for it. It's hard for people to admit to themselves that they have a drug or alcohol problem.



Working up the courage to confront a friend about his or her drinking or drug use is very difficult. In fact, it may be one of the hardest things you'll ever have to do. But part of being a good friend is recognizing when your friend needs help — even if it wasn't asked for. After all, you'd help your friend out and give him advice on other stuff like family, dating and school, so why wouldn't you talk to him about drugs? Sometimes, just bringing up the subject with your friend is the wake-up call that's needed. Did you know that 68 percent of teens said they would turn to a friend or brother/sister about a serious problem related to substance abuse? This means that when you talk, your friends will listen — even if you've tried drugs or alcohol yourself. Don't underestimate your own power to influence your friend and explain to him how you see his drug use getting out of hand. Sure, it may have been his choice to start using drugs in the first place, and you may be scared that your friend will get mad at you and tell you that his choices are none of your business. But if you really think your friend needs help, you have a responsibility to him — and your friendship — to step up and say something. By not talking with your friend about your concerns, you are only sending him the silent message that his drug or alcohol problem is no big deal.

- Start by telling your friend how much she means to you and that you are worried about her.
- Give him examples of when his drug use or drinking has caused problems or affected you or others.
- Let her know that you want to help and tell her what you will do for her.
- Discuss this issue when your friend is not high.
- If you aren't comfortable having this conversation with your friend by yourself, get some other friends to help you out — there's safety and support in numbers. Be careful not to “gang up” on your friend.
- Try talking in confidence to an adult that you trust before talking to your friend. There are many people that can help you figure out the best approach — like a trusted family member, teacher, coach, school counselor or student assistance professional, family doctor, school nurse or faith leader.
- If you are not comfortable talking with your friend face-to-face, try writing a note or an e-mail.

Finally, remember that talking with your friend is only the first step. It may take several conversations before he or she understands how serious you are about the drinking or drug use. Don't give up if he or she doesn't stop after your first conversation. Your friend may need additional help to face his or her drinking or drug problem, like talking to a counselor or getting treatment. Tell her that you'll help her get the help she needs, and then follow through.

For examples of how to address your friend's drug use and drinking and to hear from kids who have been in your situation, go to www.freevibe.com.

IT'S NOT YOUR
FAULT

Helping a friend with a drug or alcohol problem is hard work and can be a very difficult experience for you as well as your friend. You may feel a great deal of pressure

to get your friend to stop drinking or doing drugs. Or you may get discouraged if your efforts to convince your friend to stop using drugs or alcohol don't work. But it is important to know that your friend's drug or alcohol use is NOT your fault. Remember that it's ultimately up to your friend to make that change and you can't do that for him. Sometimes, as much as you may try to get your friend to quit or seek help, you just can't seem to make it happen. If you find yourself in this situation, you should do one of the following:

- Seek support from other friends or trusted adults — your friend is not the only one who needs help in this situation.
- Limit the time you spend with your drug- or alcohol-using friend. Remember your friend's use may also be putting you at risk.
- Start thinking about yourself — get out and participate in activities that you enjoy to take your mind off of the situation.

