



How to spot the symptoms of drug addiction!

Parents often do not want to admit the possibility that their children are on drugs and in so doing often dismiss mal adjusted behaviour to teenage puberty, bad behaviour or stress.

By adopting this attitude, parents are in actual fact disinterested and uninvolved in their children's lives. They fail to set an example and boundaries that their children need to adhere too.

Parents need to be well informed about the dangers of drugs so that they can talk to their children about them.

You cannot ignore the problem in the hope that the problem will solve itself. We need to play an integral part in our children's lives, as parents, older siblings, care givers, or even friends, if we do not try make a "diffrins" then who will?

Things that parents should know:

1. Factors influencing experimentation with drugs:

- Lack of affection and attention from parents,
- The demands of a performance-driven society,
- Parents belief that their kids would never take drugs and thus do not inform them,
- Parents' ignorance about drugs,
- Peer pressure, and

- Over emphasis about the “harmlessness” of the drugs by the peer group.

2. **Drug use attract paraphernalia such as:**

- The excessive use of mouth sprays, chewing gum and sweets to remove the smell of alcohol,
- Burning of incense to disguise the sweetish marijuana odours,
- Continuous use of eye drops to clear bloodshot eyes,
- Sunglasses worn at inappropriate times,
- Unexplained tablets, powders or small dry seeds or dagga pips,
- Syringes or needles,
- Small mirror, razors and straws,
- Tiny spoons and small containers,
- Unusual pipes or broken-off bottlenecks,
- Plastic bank packets or unidentified packages wrapped in brown paper,
- Bloodstained cotton wool or other material,
- Unsmoked cigarettes with the filters broken off,
- Empty cough mixture bottles or diet pill containers, or
- Inhalant substances such as glue, thinners, turpentine, lighter fluids or acetone.

3. **Some common symptoms of drug taking are:**

- Loss of appetite,
- Being unusually sleepy or unable to sleep at night,
- Bouts of talkative, excitable, and over active behaviour,
- Being unusually irritable, aggressive and even violent,
- Telling lies or acting secretively,
- Losing interest in school work, and bunking classes,
- Losing interest in hobbies and sport,
- Money or valuables disappearing from home,
- Unusual spots, sores and marks on and around the mouth and nose,
- Stains and chemical smells on clothing and about the body,
- Changing friendship patterns,
- Coming to the notice of the police for unruly behaviour,

- Change in appetite,
- Lack of communication with the family,
- Neglect of personal hygiene,
- Frequent visits to places known and associated with drugs and drug dealers, and
- Impaired word performance.

4. **If you suspect your child or someone you know, is abusing drugs:**

- Try to remain calm,
- Facilitate and communicate supportiveness,
- Involve yourself in your child's life - get to know their friends, interests and movement, get talking,
- Read as much as you can about drugs and drug addiction,
- Let alcohol and drugs be a "normal" topic of discussion. Ask your child his/her feelings on the subject, be open to differences of opinion and suggest you both need to learn more,
- Stress love and concern for your child,
- Consult professional assistance if you need help handling the situation,
- Join a support group for parents in the same situation,
- Be aware of your child's problem areas. Be respectful of them and a good listener,
- Ask simple direct questions such as "Are you smoking dagga?" "Are you drinking excessively?" If the answer is negative, but you suspect drug involvement, keep the lines of communication open by remaining in touch with your child's friends, activities and environment, and
- Help your child to deal with peer pressure.
- **Start going to church... In fact, take your children there and attend together with them!**

What not to do...

- Get hysterical and make blunt or angry accusations,
- Threaten the person physically or emotionally,
- Promise them rewards if they stop abusing drugs,
- Moralise them or use moralistic judgement,
- Punish them,
- Throw them out of the house,
- Manipulate them,
- Play an emotional verbal game e.g.: "how could you do this to us?"

- Believe promises that it won't happen again,
- Lecture on the dangers of drugs,
- Tell the whole world,
- Blame other people,
- Try to push them into where they're getting the drugs, and
- Don't ever back down if your child resists your attempts to get more involved in his/her life.

5. If you discover that your child is definitely taking drugs:

- Take a balanced, calm view. Avoid over-reaction or tearful recriminations,
- Obtain as much information as possible from your child about the extent, duration and circumstances of the drug abuse,
- Check if your child wants help to handle the drug problem. If so, offer all the support you can and arrange to see your G.P. or any suitable professional assistance,
- Take a clear, strong position that drug abuse is unacceptable and know the reasons why. Draw your child's attention to his behaviour, moods and deterioration, and
- Insist on a discussion with an expert to clarify knowledge and attitudes.