

ebook

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# REHAB FOR TEENAGERS



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## 1. Introduction

Parents are rarely drug experts, but in modern society it may be an advantage. Unbeknown to them, many may have a drug addict in their homes and are funding their child's addiction. If a teenager is taking drugs or drinking alcohol, chances are that they are going to great lengths to hide it from their parents. Teenagers, by nature, explore boundaries, test new limits and are secretive. They do not want their parents too involved in their lives, which makes it easier for them to hide their new habits and more difficult for parents to set and enforce appropriate boundaries.

Adolescents are more at risk of becoming addicted than adults. People who do not abuse substances before the age of 21 have a much diminished risk of becoming addicts or alcoholics. Almost three-quarters of addicts started using drugs in their teens.

Adolescence is a complicated and intense time between childhood and adulthood and a period of great physical and psychological change.

During this phase the main focus is on finding an identity, with associated major decisions and "new" responsibilities thrown into the equation. This search for identity means that teens move towards greater individuality and friends start replacing family as their social support mechanism.

For this reason, acceptance in a group is extremely important, and if taking drugs or drinking makes this acceptance happen, then it seems like a small price to pay.

It is quite disturbing to discover that your teenager is taking drugs or using alcohol, and a natural response is to worry about the child and the impact of this habit on their health and their future. When parents discover the risk associated with the common drugs that teenagers use and abuse, they become very alarmed. It is important for parents to know that any use of alcohol or drugs by teenagers constitutes abuse, purely because it is illegal. Early intervention is the best policy in helping their child.

## 2. Why teenagers use drugs

Drugs and alcohol change the way you feel and the feelings they give can range from cool, confident and grown-up to terribly hung-over, ashamed and isolated. Taking their psychological development into account, they see the advantages of drug use more clearly than the disadvantages.

The reasons **why teenagers try**, and continue to use, drugs are vast and varied, but some reasons are more common than others. Despite the collective view that people take drugs to get high, it is far more complicated than just that. They are invariably motivated by an array of psychological factors, rather than just physical ones. Teenagers want to have friends and fun. Danger is part of the appeal and they enjoy the social status of being a risk-taker.

### Peer pressure

Teenagers search for identity and have a need to fit in. This tendency could lead to the desire to be with and explore friendships with people whom teenagers would not normally associate with. They may aspire to be friends with the popular group in school. This could put them in positions that they do not know how to handle and potentially give in when being offered drugs.

Alcohol and certain other substances are effective in improving socialisation skills, which may cause teenagers to give in to peer pressure to drink alcohol, or use other substances, in social settings where they feel uncomfortable. While high, they may feel calmer and more secure and generally more comfortable in these difficult situations, thus proving to their peers that they fit in and are worthy of their friendship.

It is ultimately the teenagers' desire to be included that let them give in to peer pressure and try substances. **Peer pressure** is especially prevalent when a teenager is naturally introverted, struggling to make friends or is new in a social setting (like school). They sometimes feel that they need to prove themselves as rebels and risk-takers and this effort to get along with others can trigger the temptation to use drugs and alcohol.

To reduce the risk of teenagers giving into peer pressure to use substances, they need to be supported to develop confidence and **positive self-esteem**.



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## Transition

Adolescence is naturally one of the biggest transitions humans go through in their lives. Starting and ending puberty are two of the most significant stages developmental stages in our lives and need to be managed carefully. Parents getting divorced and moving house or schools are other very significant transitions in a teenager's life. Any form of change can cause emotional upheaval, which can make substance abuse tempting.

It is difficult to predict how transitions will influence specific teenagers. We are all individuals and we all react differently to change. Some teenagers may find adapting to change very difficult and will find it tempting to try alcohol and/or other substances to deal with the fear, anxiety and concerns. Others will be excited by change and use substances to enhance those feelings.

## Availability

Part of being a teenager is gaining more freedom and mobility. With this increased freedom of movement, comes the rise of availability of drugs and alcohol, as they can now go out and buy substances. Opportunities to use increase, because they can go to places where there is less adult supervision.

Since drugs might be relatively easy to obtain, they may be more willing to try certain substances. They solely focus on the good feelings and do not consider the negative consequences of substance abuse. They are young and immature and the constant message that drugs are bad for them, increase their curiosity. Horror stories about addicts **dying in gutters** tend to have little impact on teens and their drug habits.

## Emotional and Psychological conditions

Emotional pain is a common cause for substance abuse and can stem for various different sources. Teenagers who have experienced **some form of trauma** or have been abused when they were younger, have a higher risk of becoming addicted than those who have not experienced this. It is important to note that trauma is experienced individually and what can be excessively traumatic for one person can leave no impression on another. Further, abuse comes in many forms, not just sexual or physical, but emotional and spiritual abuse can leave significant emotional scars. Teenagers are invariably not equipped to deal with both the normal pain of adolescence and this additional emotional pain, and find running from or numbing the pain with drugs an easier alternative to dealing with it.

**Psychological conditions** can develop in any person and is known to be the root cause in many cases of addiction. With the esteem issues related to adolescence and the need to fit in, many teenagers do not acknowledge their psychological conditions and prefer to self-medicate with substances instead, ultimately causing more harm. Parents are advised to be aware of and watch for signs of mental health issues and be equipped to take measures to find appropriate help when needed.

## Stress

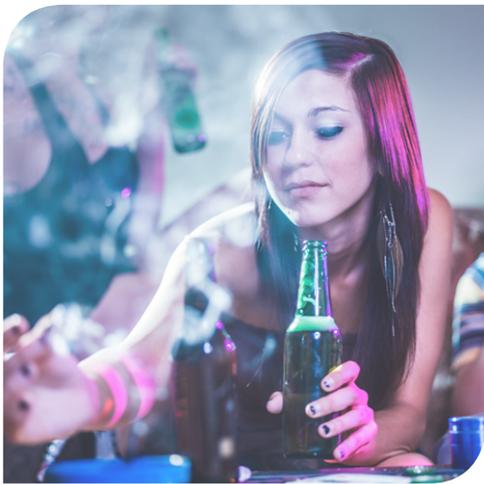


Modern teenagers live stressful lives. The demands on their time and energy are vast and the need to perform is significant. Many teens feel ill-equipped within themselves and, with the family structure of broken homes being prevalent, many do not have the necessary support system to see them through these stressors. They end up having to make very difficult and significant decisions on their own, which increase their stress levels and drugs become an option to reduce or escape from these stressors.

## Fun

Many teenagers see experimenting with drugs as nothing but just fun and do not consider the risks. They may experience boredom and find the use of illicit drugs exciting. They are curious and believe that they are being special and different by having this type of fun.

## 3. Types of drugs most commonly used by teenagers



The type of drugs most commonly used by teenagers vary widely depending on their location and their financial standing, but some drugs are generally more popular amongst teenagers. If we know what substances are being abused, then it is easier to be aware of what signs to look for when we think our teenagers are using drugs.

### Marijuana

Current data shows that just under 40 percent of illicit drug use by teenagers is marijuana and research is indicating that the abuse is on the increase. Marijuana is perceived as a “low risk” drug and, falsely, believed to be non-addictive.

Marijuana causes psychological dependence, which is in no way less dangerous or damaging than physical addiction. Teenagers do not see it as dangerous and are more willing to try it.

If you suspect that your teen is using or has become addicted to marijuana, be on the lookout for an increased use of eye drops or constant red and irritable eyes; isolation from friends and family; a drop in interest in personal hygiene; a rise in absenteeism from school; severe memory and learning problems; involvement in criminal activities and the onset of psychiatric symptoms, like psychotic states. For more information see: <http://wedorecover.com/addiction/addiction-types/cannabis-addiction-treatment.html>

### Synthetic marijuana

Synthetic marijuana is any designer drug that mimics the effects of marijuana. It is often termed “spice products” and sold under brand names like K2 and Spice. It is, as its name suggests, synthetic, and produce negative results in drug tests and is illegal in most countries.



The risks associated with the use of synthetic marijuana is a huge concern, as it is laced with dangerous chemicals and the health risks are not fully understood yet.

Its short term effects are very unpredictable, ranging from euphoria, to nausea, vomiting, increased heart rate and extreme increase in blood pressure. In the longer term, it could cause kidney damage and the body may become “frozen”, where the person becomes statue-like and everything shuts down. It also may precipitate psychosis and in some cases it may prolong the psychosis. Teenagers assume it to be less dangerous than marijuana, because it is synthetic, but what makes it so dangerous is the inconsistent chemicals that are used when creating it. Like marijuana, it leads to mental addiction, which may become physical, as a result of the chemicals.

## Nyaope

This is a drug that is becoming the drug of choice among thousands of teenagers, specifically, South Africans, where its

consumption is twice the world norm. It is a deadly mix of marijuana and cheap heroin. A major attraction to this drug is that it is inexpensive.

To increase the high and make it last longer, bicarbonate of soda, pool cleaner or even Rattex are mixed into it. Teenagers who use nyaope are three times more likely to be involved in violent crimes than those using other drugs. Nyaope gives the user a rush or feeling of euphoria or when heavier doses are used, it causes drowsiness and feelings of being relaxed. The heroin in it causes extreme physical dependence and contributes to addicts constantly wanting to use stronger mixtures.

## Prescription medication

One of the most common prescription drugs abused by teenagers is Adderall. It is prescribed for ADHD and narcolepsy and is easily available. Its abuse is sometimes related to a legitimate medical condition. It impairs thinking and reactions and generally numbs alertness. Another common prescription drug that gets abused by teenagers is Vicodin. It is an opiate drug, mostly prescribed for pain, which makes it easily available. Some people develop tolerance, meaning that they need more and more to get the same effect, which could be the cause for various and numerous illegal activities. The tolerance to its euphoric effects develops fast and that adds to its danger. A high dose of opiates can cause cardiac or respiratory arrest that can result in death. They are trying to get higher and (accidentally) overdose.



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## 4. Signs that teenagers may be using drugs or alcohol



Do not take it lightly if someone tells you that your child is drinking or using drugs. Do yourself, and your child, a favour and look into it. The following are potential warning signs that your child may be using substances: they suddenly develop a need for extra cash for unexplained or unclear reasons; their speech slurs; they stagger; their pupils have changed or their eyes are bloodshot. If there is a pattern of several of these **warning signs**, action is necessary. Although the signs of drug and alcohol use vary between individuals and differ greatly because of the array of drugs that can be used, there are some symptoms of substance abuse that can raise parents' and friends' suspicion in time to find help before it is too late.

### Extreme mood swings

Teenagers are naturally prone to mood swings, but extreme and sudden changes in their moods, from being deliriously happy one moment to depressed and withdrawn the next and even in a fit of rage a few moments later, may be a sign that they are abusing substances.

### Poor performance at school

A teenager who performed well or average at school and whose grades suddenly drop significantly, may be having a drug or alcohol problem. If there is also a change in their attitude toward school, then the red flag is up and substance abuse should be investigated.

### Changes in health

The ways in which drug or alcohol abuse can affect **someone's health** is vast, but look out for a significant change in appetite. Some drugs cause an increase in appetite, while others suppress it. The sudden onset of gastric disorders, digestive problems and ulcers are common side effects of the abuse of many substances and might be signs worth looking into. A further warning signal is a significant change in the teenager's sleeping pattern.

### Signs in the home

Some of the first signs of teenage alcohol or drug abuse are missing alcoholic beverages from the drinks cabinet or the disappearance of medication from the medicine chest. If you find unexplained empty containers around the home or garden, then there is reason for concern. If the teenager suddenly starts to **smoke cigarettes** openly, there is even more reason to investigate.

## New friends

It is common for teenagers, once they start using or drinking, to suddenly turn their backs on their old friends and start hanging out with other teens, normally older than themselves, who also use and drink. If you suspect that the people whom they are friends with abuse drugs, then it is a sign that your child might be doing it too.

## Change in attitude

If a generally compliant teenager suddenly develops problems with authority figures, shows signs of dishonesty or starts having trouble with the law, then we may be dealing with possible substance abuse. Watch out for abrupt illogical changing attitudes toward anti-drug or anti-alcohol programs or materials.

## The devil hides in the details

Be aware that the following things are also tell-tale signs of possible drug or alcohol abuse: a loss in interest in personal hygiene; sudden and consistent use of breath mints or chewing gum; extreme changes in their hairstyle or choice of clothing and changes in the way they move or use of language.



# 5. What to do if your teenager is abusing drugs or alcohol

The risk of teenagers developing an addiction is higher than for adults. It is thus imperative, when a teenager is abusing drugs or alcohol, even if a physical or emotional dependence has not developed yet, that help is sought sooner rather than later. Over the past years, the medical community has recognised that teenagers cannot be treated the same as adults, because their reasons for using and associated complications are different than those of adults. Young people can be unsafe in adult groups, as emotional and sexual things can be problematic and lead to abuse and trauma, they will most probably just feel uncomfortable and not open up. If staff are not trained and equipped to deal with the development needs of teenagers, they may use inappropriate techniques and cause more damage. Adolescents do not respond well to approaches that are effective for adults.

Fortunately parents are now in a position where they can select options specifically designed for teens, mostly based on the intensity and the duration of the substance abuse.



- **Early intervention** is always the best. It is recommended that parents intervene as soon as they know that their teen is using or drinking, even if addiction is not present yet. Remember, any form of drug and alcohol use is illegal and place the teen in a dangerous situation with the law. The earliest form of intervention is for the teen to see a drug counsellor, in order to get to the reason for the use and to prevent the use to escalate into addiction.
- **Outpatient treatment:** The teen is allowed to attend school and will engage with the recovery program only a few times a

week. This is appropriate for teenagers with mild addictions, as exposing teens with minor drug problems to older teens with more severe issues, can exacerbate the problem. Contagion with behaviours and attitudes is still an issue at that age and staff must be trained to deal with this.

- **Intensive outpatient treatment:** This type of treatment allows the teen to stay at home, but it involves a lot of sessions per week and an intense involvement in the recovery process. This is applicable for teenagers with more serious problems.
- **Dual-diagnosis inpatient treatment:** This type of treatment is appropriate for teenagers with severe addictions, where there are possible associated medical risks involved. Proper assessment of the person before treatment is imperative, as it will determine whether there are mental illness, like depression, anxiety or ADHD involved, which could be driving the addiction. Nearly half of teens with drug problems have additional psychiatric conditions, which need to be addressed with the addiction problem to make treatment viable.
- **Long-term residential treatment:** This type of treatment is generally recommended for intense addiction, with the involvement of criminal activities. It is normally for longer periods and the teens need to stay in the programs for that period of time. Harsh therapeutic styles must be guarded against. Punitive style treatment programs should be avoided. Psychological and growing neurobiological evidence prove that humans, especially teenagers, respond better to reward-based incentive systems than to punishment.

Prevention is always and stays better than cure. It has been proven that teens who have constant and healthy communication with their parents and the rest of their families, have a lower risk of falling into drug and alcohol abuse. It is strongly recommended that families talk honestly and openly about their feelings and the challenges that teenagers face daily: like peer pressure, sex, teen pregnancy, self-esteem and substance abuse. Allow your teenager to partake in developing family rules and empower them to make choices relevant to their age. Teens need to feel loved and trusted and those who do so are less likely to turn to drugs and/or alcohol to fill those gaps and get into recovery sooner once they do start using.

If your teenager refuses treatment, do not despair. The incorrect assumption prevails that someone must voluntarily submit to treatment for it to be a success. The fact is that outcomes do not appear to be related to pre-treatment levels of motivation. You can force your teen to submit to treatment. An intervention is one of the best ways to help your loved one to go for treatment. It is a meeting of the family and friends, even teachers and other concerned individuals, during which the sole aim is to convince the person that their using or drinking has reached a stage when help is necessary.

For detailed information on how to stage a successful intervention,  
[Download our Intervention Guide.](#)

## 6. Different treatment approaches

The services offered in adolescent treatment programs are very much in line for those offered for adults, but the difference lies in how the strategy is approached and applied. As mentioned before, teenagers and adults have different reasons for abusing drugs and alcohol. Treatment programs that do not thoroughly engage with these underlying motives for using are bound to fail. Teenagers are still in the middle of their physical and mental development, which makes it necessary to involve different strategies when dealing with them, as opposed to dealing with adults.

### Individual counselling

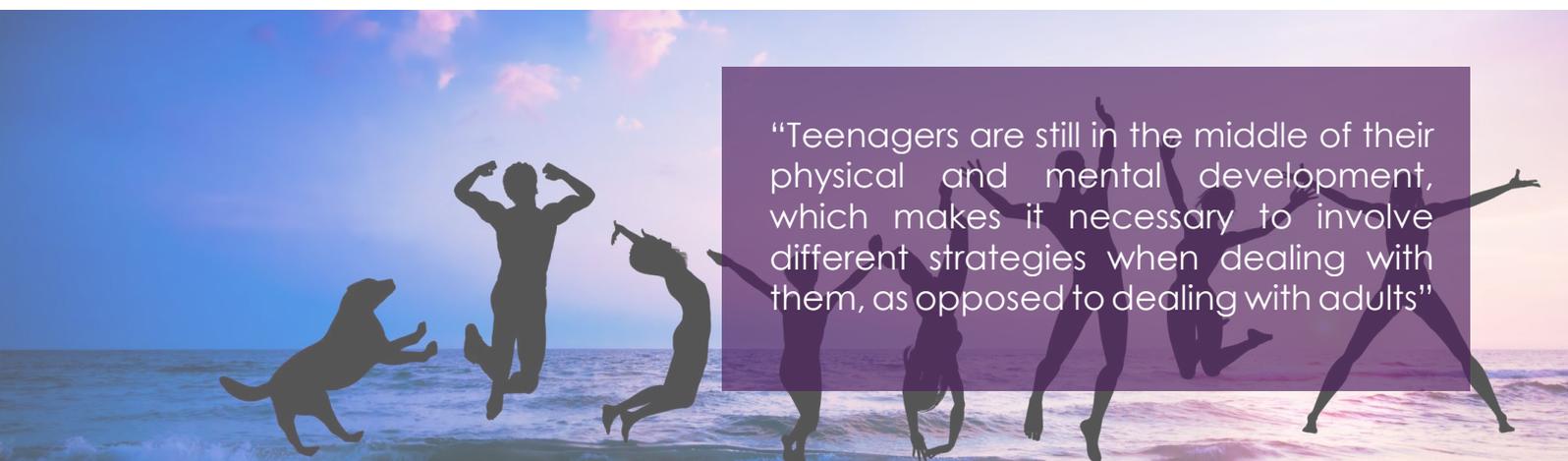
Individual counselling is the common ground between all treatment programs. It is aimed to help identify the causes of the substance abuse and it takes the form of the teen merely talking to a trained counsellor. There are many different styles and approaches to counselling, but the end result is that the counsellor attempts to identify the root cause of the addiction, so that an appropriate treatment program can be designed for the specific client.

### Cognitive and alternative therapies

Cognitive therapy involves the locating and revising negative thoughts, perceptions and beliefs and providing ways to avoid them. These type of therapies may be used if and when appropriate, depending on the specific situation. After the initial counselling, and taking the cause of the substance abuse and the individual being dealt with into consideration, the treatment team will decide on the best way to deal with each case.

### Family therapy

Family involvement in therapy is normally recommended and it is a key component of any quality treatment program - but even more so where teenagers are involved. It gives them the home environment they need to feel supported, while overcoming their substance abuse. It gives better insight into addiction and educate the family on their roles to ensure that their teens develop a thorough recovery plan. The goal of the family counselling will differ, depending on the reason for the drug use.



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## 12. Conclusion

Drug trends around the world are changing. More teenagers are trying drugs than before, they are starting at a younger age and the types of drugs they use are more addictive.

Telling your teenager that drugs kill is not an effective scare tactic. They see more people using drugs casually and not being impacted seriously, than seeing deaths. This makes them discard the warnings entirely.

We need to engage with our teenagers on a regular and healthy level and be aware of the symptoms of drug and alcohol use. We must not hesitate to take immediate and decisive action. Our children's lives depend on our actions.



**For more information on how to get your teen into a rehab, call us now and we will happily assist in finding the best treatment available.**

**Please call 082-747-3422 in South Africa  
or 0800-955-4357 from the UK.**

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