

# Five Signs of Teen Substance Abuse



**Empowering**  
the Courage and  
Ability to Change



# Five Signs of Teen Substance Abuse

Adolescence (ages 13-17) is a time of significant change. So, how do we tell the difference between signs of typical teenage development, and behavior that could indicate substance abuse? Unfortunately, there are no hard and fast rules. Often, the changes we see are simply teenage growing pains.

However, if you notice several warning signs showing up at once, sudden rather than gradual changes, and behaviors that go beyond what your experience tells you is normal, call a professional and ask for advice. Remember, as a parent or guardian, family member or friend, you may be the only person who can see the changes and help the teen you care about find a path to a healthier life.

## 1. Changes at school

Middle school and high school bring many new academic pressures. New teachers, unfamiliar settings and higher expectations can cause temporary drops in performance and attitude. Most teens will adapt and find their way. Small setbacks can be expected but watch for an ongoing pattern of diminishing effort and interest.

Be aware of:

- + **Falling grades**
- + **Declining effort and participation**
- + **An “I don’t care” attitude**
- + **Skipping classes and school**
- + **Missing or quitting extracurricular activities**
- + **Teacher complaints of misbehavior**
- + **Recurring need for discipline**

## 2. Changes in friendships

During the adolescent years, teens are trying to figure out how they fit in. This can result in the addition of new friend groups into their lives based on shared hobbies and interests. Welcome this time of personal growth for your teen but watch for the sudden absence of longtime friends and an unwillingness to introduce you to new friends.

Be aware of:

- + **Frequent change of friends**
- + **Disappearance of childhood friends**
- + **Leaving a longtime peer group**
- + **An interest in hanging out with older kids**
- + **Secretiveness about time spent with new friends**
- + **Reluctance to have you get to know new friends**

### 3. Changes at home

Home and family routines vary greatly. But for the most part, every home—the people, their relationships and ways they act, and the activities that are part of life—creates some state of normal that family members come to appreciate and depend on. If your teen begins to back away from or rebel against these norms, it can be a signal that there are outside influences affecting their priorities and decision-making. Also, watch for unfamiliar or out-of-the-ordinary items around the house or in the car.

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### 4. Changes in appearance

Physical signs will vary depending on the substance being used and some can be difficult to detect. Listed here are some general and more noticeable signs to watch for.

*\* Resources for drug-specific signs and symptoms on back page.*

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### 5. Changes in personality

Drugs, alcohol and other illicit substances affect the brain in many different ways. They can cause your teen to act like a different person than the one you have known. New behaviors and personality characteristics can seem minor, but take note of them. They might be early signs of substance abuse.

*\* Resources for drug-specific signs and symptoms on back page.*

Be aware of:

- + **Withdrawal from family activities and routines**
- + **Excessive time alone**
- + **Locked bedroom doors**
- + **Heavy use of incense or air fresheners**
- + **Disconnecting from family relationships**
- + **Exaggerated reactions to questions**
- + **Breaking curfew without a reasonable excuse**
- + **Vague descriptions of social activities**
- + **Unfamiliar containers, wrappers and smells**
- + **Missing prescription or over-the-counter drugs**

Be aware of:

- + **Poor or declining personal hygiene and grooming**
- + **Bloodshot, glassy eyes**
- + **Widely dilated pupils or pinpoint pupils**
- + **Sudden, significant weight loss or weight gain**
- + **Flushed cheeks**
- + **Strange smell on clothing or breath**
- + **Nosebleeds or constantly runny nose**
- + **Lack of coordination**
- + **Avoiding eye contact**

Be aware of:

- + **Changes in eating or sleeping habits**
- + **Loss of interest in favorite activities**
- + **Low energy and lack of motivation**
- + **A withdrawn or depressed attitude**
- + **Uncommon irritability and defensiveness**
- + **Difficulty keeping focus**

# Teen substance abuse. Know the signs. Ask for help.

The Root Center for Advanced Recovery is a private, non-profit, behavioral healthcare organization providing mental health and substance abuse treatment, prevention, community health services and research.

We provide a continuum of behavioral healthcare services to help individuals struggling with substance use disorders. Counselors work with each patient to develop an individualized recovery plan which is based on the unique strengths, needs, abilities and preferences of each person served.

## Adolescent Intensive Outpatient Program

Experimentation with drugs and alcohol during the teen years may seem like a common part of growing up, but it often lowers inhibitions and can result in very serious consequences.

Root Center's Adolescent Intensive Outpatient Program taps into our 50+ years of substance use recovery expertise. If you have a teen family member or friend in need of substance abuse treatment services in Connecticut, we can help.

**rootcenter.org**  
**860.643.3200**

## OTHER RESOURCES ON DRUG-SPECIFIC SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

### Partnership for Drug-Free Kids

How to Spot the Early Warning Signs: <https://drugfree.org/article/spotting-drug-use/>  
How to Talk with Your Teen: <https://drugfree.org/article/how-to-talk-with-your-teen/>

### National Institute on Drug Abuse

Drugs that People Misuse: <https://easyread.drugabuse.gov/content/drugs-people-misuse>  
Drugs of Abuse: <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse>

### National Institute on Drug Abuse for Teens

Facts on Teen Drug Use: <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/parents#tab-2>

### Bristol Clinic

1098 Farmington Avenue  
Bristol, CT 06010  
860-589-6433

### Doctor's Clinic

345 Main Street  
Hartford, CT 06106  
860-525-2181

### Henderson Johnson Clinic

16-18 Weston Street  
Hartford, CT 06120  
860-527-5100

### Manchester Clinic

335 Broad Street, 1st Floor  
Manchester, CT 06040  
860-643-3210

### New Britain Clinic

70 Whiting Street  
New Britain, CT 06051  
860-827-3313

### New London Clinic

931 Bank Street  
New London, CT 06320  
860-447-2233

### Torrington Clinic

140 Commercial Boulevard  
Torrington, CT 06790  
860-482-8796

### Willimantic Clinic

54-56 Boston Post Road  
Willimantic, CT 06226  
860-456-7990



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