

If You Suspect Your Child Is Using Alcohol or Other Drugs

You are faced with a painful and scary reality that many parents are not ready for, or equipped to deal with. The feelings you have may be intense or overwhelming. It is important for you and your child that you not allow your feelings to cloud your decision making process.

This is a time for you to carefully plan your response to your child's possible chemical use and take positive action.

At this point many parents ask **What Do I Do Now?** As a parent you have options.

Option One: Do Nothing. Some parents believe that chemical use by an adolescent is only experimentation and a normal part of the adolescent life stage. A phase they will grow out of. Others believe that if the adolescent gets into enough trouble they will stop using mind altering chemicals on their own.

Our philosophy is that the use of mind-altering substances is such a risk to the emotional, psychological, spiritual, and intellectual development of a young person that their use cannot be tolerated for any reason. Addiction occurs in a very short period of time for adolescents (about six months).

Option Two: Ask your child to submit to a drug test. This is a helpful tool to help the child gain back trust or to confirm the suspicions of a parent. A drug test can be a tool for students to remain sober. Students agreeing to random drug tests can use this fact to turn down the drugs offered by friends and to avoid further trouble.

Option Three: Get a Chemical Dependency Evaluation for your child. If your child is using drugs of abuse he/she has a relationship with chemicals. A chemical dependency evaluation done by an addiction counselor could give more information about the nature and extent of the relationship. If your child is experiencing family, legal, academic, or personal problems, or is working far below their potential, chemical abuse may be an underlying cause.

Option Four: Enroll your child in a drug education program. Drug education programs are designed to provide parents and adolescents with information about drug abuse and harmful consequences so that family discussions and family decisions can be made on an informational level and not on an emotional level.

Option Five: Seek more information. As a parent you have a right to seek more information about your child and their chemical use. Contact his/her school to get progress reports from teachers, counselors, etc.

Contact parents of your child's friends to learn more about his/her friends and their habits and hobbies. Other parents may have concerns or information they could share with you to shed more light on your child's behavior and chemical use. Read books, magazine articles and any other sources of information about drugs of abuse. Information is a powerful tool in fighting adolescent chemical abuse. Get yourself into counseling to assist in developing strategies for dealing with this issue.

Option Six: Create or join a support group. Sharing your experiences with other parents will help to empower you and break the sense of isolation that can surround this issue. Other parents may have experiences or information that is helpful to you.

Study the options listed above. Rate the options from 1 to 6 (with 1 being the options you are most in favor of and 6 being the option you are least in favor of).

<u>Rating</u>	<u>Option</u>
_____	Do Nothing
_____	Ask your child to submit to a drug test.
_____	Get a chemical dependency evaluation for your child.
_____	Enroll your child in a drug education program.
_____	Seek more information.
_____	Create or join a support group.

Below list reasons you are attracted to the option you selected as most favorable.

Below list reasons you were not attracted to the option you selected as least favorable.

Abstinence Contracts

One very important goal of raising an adolescent is to help them to achieve adulthood with their mental and physical assets intact. In other words to help them grow up safe and sane. Alcohol or other drug use threatens the physical safety and emotional wellbeing of a young person. Adolescents who repeatedly use mind-altering chemicals risk addiction or even worse, death. Addiction can occur very quickly for an adolescent (in about six months) and death can occur with one time use or the use of small amounts of some chemical substances (i.e. cocaine, heroin, etc. . .). If you are concerned that your young person is thinking of becoming involved with (or is already involved with) the use of alcohol or other drugs then an abstinence contract may help you head off this issue with your young person. Abstinence contracts can be an effective prevention and intervention tool for parents.

Purpose: The abstinence contract is intended to provide your adolescent with an incentive to avoid chemical use, or to terminate chemical use if that is already occurring. A formalized contracting process serves to provide written documentation of the agreement between you and your young person. The contract also helps clearly define your expectation for abstinence and outlines clear consequences for chemical use. Once the contract is initiated any chemical use brings your adolescent into violation of the contract and into conflict with their choice to use chemicals. It can also provide a mechanism for young people to intervene on themselves if chemical use is problematic.

Abstinence Contracts Work Because: Adolescents believe that they have absolute power and control over themselves, their decisions, and their world. When an adolescent is presented with a contract they more often than not will sign it out of sincere belief that they are in control of their chemical use. If they are able to refrain from chemical use the contract has worked. If the adolescent is not able to refrain from chemical use, then the contract works to help reduce their denial about chemical use and their relationship to it.

General Guidelines: To promote the best chance of success for you and your adolescent, several guidelines need to be emphasized. These guidelines are as follows:

- 1.) Be willing to follow through with the consequences of the contract. For the contract to be effective parents need to demonstrate to their young person that they possess a backbone and can stand up for an issue they are committed to.
- 2.) Keep it simple. To avoid confusion or points of conflict make the contract simple. A basic abstinence contract only needs to contain four elements: date of the agreement clearly spelled out, expectation for abstinence, clearly defined consequences for a contract violation, signature of all parties agreeing to the contract. Consequences need to be educational and a strong incentive to remain abstinent from alcohol or other drugs.
- 3.) Use a business-like approach to the contracting process. Keep a cool head. This is not intended to be a fight, argument, or power struggle between you and your adolescent.

Action Steps Required to Contract

- 1.) Before beginning to contract with your young person make a list of all the possible consequences you could use if your adolescent violates the contract. Make another list of all the reasons you would follow through with consequences and another list of all the reasons you would not follow through with the consequences if the contract is violated.
- 2.) Prepare yourself for the meeting. What are the reasons your adolescent would give for not wanting to agree to abstinence or refuse to sign the contract? What will you do if your young person refuses to sign the contract and agree to be drug free?
- 3.) Make an appointment to meet with your adolescent. Allow plenty of time for discussion. Make sure there are no time deadlines that will hinder the process.
- 4.) Meet in a neutral area of the house. Remove distraction from the meeting environment (i.e. TV, stereo, etc.). Avoid distraction such as phone, friends, siblings, etc. . . .
- 5.) As you begin, explain the purpose of the meeting to your adolescent and clearly outline your position on alcohol or other drug use by your young person and share your honest concerns with them.
- 6.) Write out the contract in front of your adolescent. Do not bring a prepared copy of the contract to the meeting.
- 7.) Make a copy for you and your adolescent. Everyone sign both copies. Give your adolescent their copy at the end of the meeting.
- 8.) Disengage- Once the contract is presented and agreed to, the meeting is over. Don't bring in other issues. Back off and let the contract take over.
- 9.) Don't Lecture. Do not repeatedly refer to the contract. Constant references to the contract will build anger and resentment in your adolescent. Your adolescent will feel you are trying to trap them. The goal is not to trap your adolescent, but let them make choices, knowing what the consequences are going to be if they choose to use alcohol or other drugs.
- 10.) Monitor the contract. Remember; don't repeatedly bring up the contract. Back off and monitor your adolescent's behavior and activities. If the adolescent uses alcohol or other drugs and you become aware of it enforce the contract.
- 11.) Enforce the contract. If your adolescent violates the contract enforce the consequences immediately (there must not be a delay). Do not allow your adolescent to attempt to renegotiate the terms of the contract after it has been violated. You must act decisively.
- 12.) Use escalating consequences. If the contract is violated and the consequences have been instituted, then renegotiate a new contract with stricter even more severe consequences.

Examples of Consequences

Lose use of vehicle	Lose Driver's License
Grounding	Lose TV/cell phone/computer, etc. . .
Get chemical dependency evaluation	See a counselor
Participate in drug education program	Participate in chemical dependency treatment

Examples of Abstinence Contracts

January 8 , 20XX

By signing this contract I, [NAME] agree to remain alcohol and other drug free.

If I violate this agreement I agree to lose the use of the car for one month.

Signature of adolescent

Signature of parent

January 8, 20XX

By signing this contract I, [NAME] agree to the following:

- 1.) To remain alcohol and other drug free.
- 2.) To not be present at parties or other gatherings where alcohol and other drugs are being used.
- 3.) To not participate in illegal activity.

If I violate this agreement I will go see a counselor and follow the counselor's recommendations.

Signature of adolescent

Signature of parent