

Alcohol Abuse and Teenagers

According to a national survey, nearly all high school students, by the time they are seniors, have tried alcohol. By a wide margin, the most popular drug of abuse for teenagers is alcohol. Many teenage users of alcohol become regular drinkers and some develop into alcohol abusers. What do we mean by “alcohol abuser?”

An alcohol abuser is someone who uses alcohol inappropriately in that he or she consumes too much alcohol, too often, or for the wrong reasons. Not only is underage drinking illegal, but it interferes with the normal tasks of daily living — attending school, going to work or carrying out activities with friends and family.

In most cases, teenagers first use alcohol because they think it will be fun or because social pressure from others makes them want to try it. Some teenagers quickly move beyond this experimentation phase and start to consume excessive amounts of alcohol in short periods of time. These teenagers are at high risk of becoming young alcoholics.

Which teenagers are most likely to become alcohol abusers? Those who have a parent, sibling, or other blood relative who is an alcoholic, those teenagers who “fall in love” with alcohol from their first use and seek out every chance to use it, and those teenagers who grow up surrounded by hard-drinking role models in parents, relatives or siblings are at a greater risk than usual of becoming alcohol abusers. If a teenager that you care about is in some, or all, of those categories, you need to be very concerned about their alcohol use.

What are the signs of alcohol use that you should look for in teenagers? Teenagers using alcohol can exhibit — physical problems and mental problems. Physical problems can include frequent hangovers, digestive upsets and bouts of either insomnia or excessive sleepiness. Mental problems can include memory loss, an inability to concentrate, anxiety and edginess. School performance often drops off and the abuser becomes alienated from the family. When getting drunk becomes the focus of the teenager’s life, the moral standards and values of the abuser often decline.

What can you do if you suspect that a teenager that you care about is using or abusing alcohol? Fortunately, teenage alcohol abuse is a treatable condition. With the right kind of help, most young abusers can recover and resume the normal tasks of growing up. The first step is to have the young person thoroughly evaluated by a mental health professional. Based on this evaluation, the most appropriate form of treatment can be recommended.

This public service has been brought to you by Foundations Behavioral Health.