

Department of Defense

Work-Life Programs

Health & Wellness



March 2024



March: National Drugs and Alcohol Facts Week

March 18 – 24 is National Drugs and Alcohol Facts Week (NDAFW). It is an annual health observance that inspires dialogue about the science of drug use and addiction among youth. NDAFW provides an opportunity to bring together scientists, students, educators, healthcare providers, and community partners to help advance the science and address youth drug and alcohol use in communities and nationwide.

Use and misuse of alcohol, illicit drugs, and prescription drugs can cause harmful consequences for people of all ages. Teens who use drugs may act out, may do poorly in school or even drop out. For some, the abuse of drugs is a passing phase. For others, substance use becomes habitual and can impact their lives in unwanted and significant ways. Substance use disorder in adults often starts in adolescence. Using drugs when the brain is still developing may cause lasting brain changes and put the user at increased risk of dependence.

Some early signs of substance use in teens can be easy to miss. They may include:

- **Resisting feedback or discipline.**
- **Losing interest in hobbies.**
- **Locking bedroom doors.**
- **Regularly asking for money or stealing.**
- **Becoming verbally abusive towards friends and family.**
- **Wearing long sleeves or long pants in warm weather.**
- **Poor hygiene.**
- **Rapid weight loss.**
- **Frequent runny nose or sniffing.**
- **Rapid weight changes.**
- **Extreme fatigue or hyperactivity.**
- **Large pupils.**

Establish two-way communication with the teen in your life. This means listening to understand--- not only offering advice. Like adults, teens may be more inclined to talk openly when they feel safe. You can be their safe person by staying calm and prioritizing hearing their point of view. It is also important to seek help for your teen if they may be experiencing underlying issues such as depression and/or anxiety as the drug use may be an attempt to self-medicate. It is also important to remember that substance use isn't a poor reflection on your parenting or your teen's character. It often represents an unmet need like stress relief or social acceptance. You can help your teen make safer choices with the right support and information.

Additional Resources:

- NIH: <https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/national-drug-alcohol-facts-week>
- Psych Central: <https://psychcentral.com/lib/teens-and-drugs-what-a-parent-can-do-to-help#next-steps>

For additional information, email the DCPAS Work-Life Branch at:

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