

# Where Is Your Teen on the Alcohol and Drug Use Spectrum?

## Abstain

Many teens choose not to experiment with drugs and alcohol.

### What YOU can do to help your teen choose to abstain:

- Serve as a good role model.
- Set limits and consistently enforce them.
- Maintain healthy communication so your teen knows that he or she can talk with you about anything.
- Help your teen feel good about his or herself, both by acknowledging successes and accepting failures.
- Encourage your teen to choose and maintain positive friendships.
- Give your teen the support he or she needs to do his or her best in school.
- Encourage your teen to say "no" to peer pressure and avoid situations where drugs and alcohol will be present.
- Maintain positive family rituals and traditions, like family dinner night.
- Realize that **even if you have done everything "right" in raising your child, substance use or abuse could still occur**. Be a vigilant parent: acknowledge indicators and address use effectively.

## Experiment

Unfortunately, many teens will experiment with drugs and alcohol during their youth. Due to the developing nature and sensitivity of the young adult brain, any alcohol or drug use should not be accepted as a "normal" part of growing-up. It is critical that parents address the presence of indicators, including:

- Changes in personality, interests, lifestyle, and peer group
- Suspicious behavior and attempts at cover-ups
- Physical evidence and behavioral incidents with negative consequences

### What YOU can do:

- Education for you and your teen is crucial. Consider:
  - 1) visiting the **Theima McMillen online resource center** to access articles and support services;
  - 2) signing-up for the **quarterly e-newsletter**;
  - 3) enrolling in **First Step**, an early detection and prevention program; and,
  - 4) **testing** your teen for drug use.

**Note: All of the above resources are provided by The Theima McMillen Center to the South Bay community at no charge.**

- Access counseling services provided at all South Bay schools, and/or obtain a consultation with a treatment program or independent professional.
- See FAQs on the reverse side.

## Use/Abuse

A percentage of teens who experiment with drugs and alcohol will be predisposed to abuse and/or addiction. Signs of abuse or addiction include:

- Inexplicable decline in grades and appearance
- Mood swings and lethargy
- Reduced memory and focus
- Defiance and anger toward parents and authority figures
- Incidents resulting in significant legal consequences or physical harm

### What YOU can do:

Seek a professional consultation to identify the best course of recovery for your teen. Outpatient treatment, which allows your teen to stay home and in school, may be an option.



**TORRANCE MEMORIAL**  
**THELMA McMILLEN CENTER**  
FOR ALCOHOL & DRUG TREATMENT

**(310) 257-5760**

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# Teen Drug and Alcohol FAQ: What Parents Need to Know

## *"Why is it important to detect and address early signs of substance use in teens?"*

The adolescent brain is still developing, particularly in the areas involved in decision making, impulse control, judgment, and risk assessment. Substance use can significantly alter the structure of the brain and interfere with the development of these important functions, leading to more at-risk behavior throughout life. Additionally, youth who start drinking before age fifteen are significantly more likely to develop alcohol dependency or abuse later in life.

## *"What can I do if I suspect my teen is using?"*

Trust your instincts. If you sense that something is wrong, you need to honor that feeling and take proactive steps. First and foremost, communicate with your teen. If substance use is suspected, drug testing is highly recommended. If your teen has nothing to hide, then there is generally little resistance. Conversely, reluctance may indicate use. It is imperative that you and your spouse coordinate with one another when addressing the situation, as your teen can sense discord and use it to his or her advantage. In order to take the guesswork out of the situation, you should consult with a credentialed professional specializing in adolescents and substance abuse. Private mental health specialists and treatment programs often provide free, confidential assessments.

## *"What are South Bay teens typically using?"*

A recent survey of South Bay teens indicated that 53% drank alcohol in the past month, a rate 14% higher than the national average. Additionally, South Bay teens reported binge drinking (25%); riding in a car with someone who had been drinking (52%); and that it is somewhat easy to get alcohol (67%). Regarding drug use, though South Bay-specific data is not available, anecdotal evidence indicates that teens have access to all of the drugs most parents are familiar with (marijuana, prescription pills, cocaine), as well as many new drugs (synthetic marijuana, inhalants, ecstasy). All drugs today, new or old, have become many times more potent over the last two decades, contributing to greater risks associated with use.

## *"What is Substance Use Disorder (SUD)?"*

SUD is characterized not only by the quantity and frequency of substance use, but by the consequences it has on the user's career/education, friend and family relationships, and health. Unfortunately, many people view teenage drug and alcohol experimentation as a normal part of growing up. Due to the potential developmental and behavioral consequences associated with use, however, it is important to change this pattern of acceptance. Even if experimentation does not develop into abuse or addiction, merely trying today's new drugs and/or drinking patterns may cause significant and lasting damage in the life of your teen.

## *"What are some warning signs that my teen may be using?"*

It is not always obvious that a teenager is using drugs or alcohol, and parents typically do not become aware until two years after their teen starts using. However, there are many **indicators** that parents may observe:

**Physical:** bloodshot eyes, dilated/contracted pupils, deterioration of personal appearance, impaired coordination and speech, tremors, and unusual smells on breath, body, and clothes (especially smoke).

**Psychological:** sudden mood swings, irritability, unexplained changes in personality, lack of motivation, periods of unusual hyperactivity, and paranoia/anxiety.

**Behavioral:** drop in performance and attendance at school, unexplained financial problems, unusual secretiveness, unwillingness to communicate or cooperate, loss of inhibitions, sudden change in friend group and hangouts, and unwillingness to discuss new friends and activities.

**Health:** frequent nosebleeds, runny nose not caused by allergies or cold, sores and/or spots around mouth, queasiness, vomiting, and sudden dramatic weight loss or gain.

**Possession of paraphernalia:** these items include: eye drops, matches/lighters, rolling papers, pipes, multiple pill bottles, make-shift tourniquets, needles, and mirrors (used for drugs that are snorted; will usually have powdery residue on the surface).

We are the South Bay's leading outpatient treatment program for alcohol and drug use. Improve your life, or your teen's, without interrupting it.



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**ADULT Program: 310-784-4879**  
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