



# CREATING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT



## Changes in teen behavior may signal drug use



**By Jane Sutter**

The teen-age years are full of challenging experiences as adolescents approach adulthood, and experimenting with drugs may be part of that journey.

While using illegal drugs doesn't necessarily lead to an addiction, 90 percent of addictions start in the teen years, according to the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids, a national non-profit organization.

Teens and even younger kids get involved with alcohol and drugs for a variety of reasons. Those reasons, according to the Partnership, can include seeing their friends (or parents) enjoying substances that also are readily available; turning to chemicals for solace to fight depression or loneliness; or because they crave excitement.

Alcohol is the drug of choice for an angry teenager because it frees him to behave aggressively, while marijuana seems to reduce aggression and is more of an avoidance drug, according to the Partnership.

The reasons for drug use are as varied as teens themselves. But parents and teachers

play a vital role in spotting drug use and helping adolescents get the help they need, according to Jennifer Keiser, alcohol and substance abuse counselor who works with adolescents and adults through the chemical dependency programs offered by Rochester Regional Health. Keiser also works as an outreach counselor in Rochester-area schools.

Keiser notes that parents should teach their children, even at an early age, about the dangers of drugs, making the conversations appropriate to the child's age. She cited the recent death of a 10-year-old boy in a Monroe County suburb that may have been caused by the child ingesting an illegal substance in the home. That type of incident is a good opportunity for parents to talk to their children, Keiser explained.

The age at which a child or teen begins to use drugs varies, Keiser said. She's known 11-year-olds who started by hanging out with the wrong crowd, for others it may be age 15 or 16. Home environment plays a major role, too.

"If a parent or a family is a user of marijuana and a child grows up in a family where that's acceptable and that's part of their everyday life," the child believes that behavior is acceptable for him or her, too, Keiser says.

While previous generations of teens got their first taste of an illicit substance by stealing cigarettes from their parents, the decline in smoking has changed that pattern. Now Keiser sees electronic cigarettes as a "big first thing for guys" who view them as harmless, but that behavior can lead to using vaporizers for smoking marijuana. Marijuana, in turn, becomes a gateway drug to more potent substances including cocaine and heroin. According to the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids, deaths from heroin increased 328 percent between 2010 and 2015, and drug deaths from fentanyl and other synthetic

### Potential signs of drug use

If an adolescent starts behaving differently for no apparent reason—such as acting withdrawn, frequently tired or depressed, or hostile—it could be a sign he or she is developing a drug-related problem. Parents and others may overlook such signs, believing them to be a normal part of puberty. Other signs include:

- A change in peer group
- Carelessness with grooming
- Decline in academic performance
- Missing classes or skipping school
- Loss of interest in favorite activities
- Trouble in school or with the law
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Deteriorating relationships with family members and friends

*Source: National Institute on Drug Abuse*



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behavior, such as a mild-mannered teen becoming grouchy or irritable; a normally well-groomed teen looking disheveled and dirty; grades slipping; a change in their circle of friends; an athlete no longer wanting to play sports, etc.

“The biggest thing I tell parents is you know your kids the best ... If they are not acting themselves, and you are feeling like ‘Hey, something is not right,’ then look into it further, have a discussion” with the child, Keiser said. The same goes for teachers; they know their students and should recognize a change and inquire about it.

If it turns out a teen is using drugs or alcohol, then the parents need to make a judgment call to determine what to do next. A determining factor may be whether the parent believes the teen used drugs or drank alcohol as a one-time event, or does the parent think the usage has been going on for a while.

Pat Aussem, a parent coach and parent partner for the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids, suggested that parents “take a breath and pause” if they discover their kids are using drugs.

“When you feel calm, have a conversation with your child to try to understand what

need alcohol/drugs is satisfying. There may be a range of needs from curiosity and feeling socially included to addressing anxiety, boredom, thrill-seeking, weight management, help with sleep, etc. Helping a child address these needs in a healthy way and structuring activities to compete with drug use can be helpful approaches. Seeking a consultation from a counselor or other professional versed in substance-use disorders may also be warranted.”

Keiser encourages parents to consider having their child undergo a professional evaluation, such as what is offered through Rochester Regional Health Chemical Dependency. That evaluation includes a drug screening and a risk assessment. Parents then meet with a counselor to get a recommendation for options, such as counseling for the individual and family. Another option for parents is to take the teen to his or her pediatrician for a urine analysis.

While adolescents face a mine field of choices when it comes to using drugs or alcohol, it’s clear that positive, active parenting can have a tremendous impact on their children’s behavior.

*Jane Sutter is a Rochester-area freelance writer.*

opioids are now seeing a sharp rise as well.

The signs of drug or alcohol use vary depending on the substance, Keiser noted. Physical signs include blood-shot eyes, dilated pupils, slurred speech and loss of balance. Other signs can include changes in

## Effective communication with your adolescent

Research shows that positive parenting has an impact on drug use among teens. The Child and Family Center at the University of Oregon developed these five questions to show how parents are important in preventing the initiation and progression of drug use among youth.

The questions are:

- Are you able to communicate calmly and effectively with your teenager regarding relationship problems?
- Do you encourage positive behaviors in your teenager on a daily basis?
- Are you able to negotiate emotional conflicts with your teenager and work toward a positive solution?
- Are you able to calmly set limits when your teenager is defiant or disrespectful?



ful? Are you able to set limits on more serious problem behavior such as drug use, if or when it occurs?

- Do you monitor your teenager to assure he or she does not spend too much unsupervised time with peers?

### LEARN MORE

#### Partnership for Drug-Free Kids

<https://drugfree.org/>

The Partnership offers a variety of information useful to parents including an e-book on treatment options.

It also has a free and confidential helpline for parents at 1-855-378-4373.

Online chat is also available through the website.

#### National Institute on Drug Abuse

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/>

For videos showing examples of positive and negative interactions between teens and parents:

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/family-checkup>

#### National Institute on Drug Abuse for Teens

Information on how drugs affect the body; includes videos, games and more, all aimed at teens. Also includes information for teachers and parents.

<https://teens.drugabuse.gov/>

# Keep your children safe this summer



Summer is a great time for children to enjoy different indoor and outdoor activities. Whether they are young children or teens, learn ways to keep your kids safe and healthy while they enjoy the summer fun. Here are some helpful safety tips from the Centers for Disease Control (if you're reading this online, underlined links in the article will take you to more information).

## Master water safety

Water-related activities are popular for getting [physical activity](#) and have many [health benefits](#). Here are some tips to stay safe while having fun.

- Learn how to prevent [recreational water illnesses](#) and help protect yourself and your kids.
- Help kids get [H2O Smartz](#) about water safety.
- Drownings are the leading cause of injury death for young children ages 1 to 4, and three children die every day as a result of [drowning](#).
- Always supervise children when in or around water. A responsible adult should constantly watch young children.
- Teach kids to swim. Formal swimming lessons can protect young children from drowning.
- Learn cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). Your CPR skills could save someone's life.
- Install a four-sided fence around home pools.

[Recreational boating](#) can be a wonderful way to spend time with family and friends. Make boating safety a priority.

- Wear a properly fitted life jacket every time you and your loved ones are on the water.

## Beat the heat and sun

Heat-related illness happens when the body's temperature control system is overloaded. [Infants and children](#) up to 4 years of age are at greatest risk. Even young and healthy people can get sick from the heat if they participate in strenuous physical activities during hot weather. For heat-related illness, [the best defense is prevention](#).

- Never leave infants, children, or pets in a parked car, even if the windows are cracked open.
- Dress infants and children in loose, lightweight, light-colored clothing.
- Schedule outdoor activities carefully, for morning and evening hours.

- Stay cool with cool showers or baths.
- Seek medical care immediately if your child has [symptoms of heat-related illness](#).

Just a few serious sunburns can increase you and your child's risk of [skin cancer](#) later in life. Their skin needs protection from the sun's harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays whenever they are outdoors.

- Cover up. Clothing that covers your and your child's skin helps protect against UV rays.
- Use sunscreen with at least SPF (sun protection factor) 15 and UVA (ultraviolet A) and UVB (ultraviolet B) protection every time you and your child go outside.

## Keep mosquitos and ticks from bugging you this summer

Protect yourself and your family by preventing bites and diseases, like [Zika](#), [West Nile virus](#) and [Lyme disease](#), which can be transmitted by insects.

- [Use an effective insect repellent](#) while playing outdoors.
- Make your backyard a [tick-safe zone](#).
- Check yourself and your children for ticks. [Ticks are easy to remove](#).

## Prevent injuries

Each year in the United States, emergency departments treat more than 200,000 children ages 14 and younger for playground-related injuries. [Falls](#) at home and on the playground are a common cause of injury.

- Check to make sure that the surfaces under [playground](#) equipment are safe, soft, and well-maintained.
- Supervise young children at all times around fall hazards, such as stairs and playground equipment.
- Use stair gates, which can help keep a busy, active child from taking a dangerous tumble.

A concussion is a type of [traumatic brain injury](#) caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head that can change the way your brain normally works. Concussions can occur in any sport or recreation activity.

- Learn [concussion signs and symptoms](#) and [what to do](#) if a concussion occurs.
- Make sure kids and teens wear the right protective equipment for their sport or recreation activity.





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DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER

## Creating a Safe Environment Newsletter

is published quarterly by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester with the aim of helping all of us keep children and vulnerable adults safe at home, at church and in all places in our community.

Comments can be directed to:  
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Diocesan Coordinator  
of Safe Environment Education  
and Compliance,  
585-328-3228, ext. 1255  
or krinefierd@dor.org.

*Victims of sexual abuse by any employee of the Church should always report to the civil authorities.*

*To report a case of possible sexual abuse and to receive help and guidance from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester, contact the diocesan Victims' Assistance Coordinator:*

Deborah Housel  
(585) 328-3228, ext. 1555;  
toll-free 1-800-388-7177,  
ext. 1555  
or dhousel@dor.org.

*All photos in this newsletter are for illustrative purposes only.*

# ADDITIONAL SAFETY RESOURCES

## ONLINE SAFETY RESOURCES

### CHILDREN & TEENS' SAFETY SITES:

#### Webonauts Internet Academy:

<http://pbskids.org/webonauts/>

*PBS Kids game that helps younger children understand the basics of Internet behavior and safety.*

#### NSTeens:

<http://www.nsteens.org/>

*A program of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that has interactive games and videos on a variety of Internet safety topics.*

## FOR PARENTS:

### Common Sense Media

<https://www.commonsensemedia.org/parent-concerns>

*A comprehensive and frequently updated site that is packed with resources. Dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing information and education*

#### Family Online Safety Institute:

<http://www.fosi.org/>

#### iKeepSafe:

<http://www.ikeepsafe.org/>

*Resources for parents, educators, kids and parishes on navigating mobile and social media technologies*

#### Faith and Safety:

<http://www.faithandsafety.org>

*Safety in a digital world, a joint project of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Greek Orthodox Church in America*

## LOCAL RESOURCES AND CONTACT INFORMATION

### Bivona Child Advocacy Center

(Monroe, Wayne counties):

[www.BivonaCAC.org](http://www.BivonaCAC.org)

585-935-7800

### Chemung County Child Advocacy Center:

607-737-8449

[www.chemungcounty.com](http://www.chemungcounty.com)

### Child Advocacy Center of Cayuga County:

315-253-9795

[www.cacofcayugacounty.org](http://www.cacofcayugacounty.org)

### Finger Lakes Child Advocacy Program

(Ontario County):

[www.cacfingerlakes.org](http://www.cacfingerlakes.org)

315-548-3232

### Darkness to Light organization:

[www.d2l.org](http://www.d2l.org)

### STEBEN COUNTY: Southern Tier Children's Advocacy Center:

[www.sthcs.org](http://www.sthcs.org)

716-372-8532

### NYS State Central Registry

(Child Abuse Reporting Hotline):

1-800-342-3720

### NYS Child Advocacy Resource and Consultation Center (CARCC)

866-313-3013

### Tompkins County Advocacy Center:

[www.theadvocacycenter.org](http://www.theadvocacycenter.org)

607-277-3203

### Wyoming County Sexual Abuse Response Team:

585-786-8846

### Yates County Child Abuse Review Team:

315-531-3417, Ext. 6