

Chapter 12

*W*hat to Do If Your Child is
Consuming Alcohol and Other Drugs



Faith is the bird that sings when the dawn is still dark.

-Rabindranath Tagore

Okay, you've faithfully executed everything that I've suggested in this book, and despite your best efforts, you may suspect or know for a fact that your child is consuming alcohol and other drugs. What should you do?

Detecting whether or not your child is consuming alcohol and other drugs is never an easy thing to do. For it can be difficult to distinguish normal teenage behavior from behavior caused by alcohol and other drugs. Changes in hairstyle, dress, slang use, and so on may be disconcerting to you, but at the same time, they may prove to be caused by nothing more than normal adolescent development. On the other hand, changes that are extreme or that last for more than a few days may signal alcohol and other drugs consumption. So, if you're concerned that your child may be consuming alcohol and other drugs, consider the following questions:

- Does your child seem withdrawn, depressed, tired, and careless about personal grooming?
- Has your child become hostile and uncooperative?
- Have your child's relationships with other family members deteriorated?
- Has your child dropped his old friends?
- Has your child lost interest in her appearance?
- Has your child's personal hygiene deteriorated?
- Has your child lost interest in hobbies, sports, and other favorite activities?

- Have your child's eating or sleeping patterns changed?

Positive answers to the questions above may indicate alcohol or other drugs use. At the same time, these signs may also apply to a child who is not using drugs but who may be having other problems at school or in the family. If you're in doubt, I urge you to err on the side of caution. Enlist the help of a qualified healthcare professional to rule out illness or other physical problems.

There are more obvious signs that you can be on the alert for—signs of drugs and drug paraphernalia for example. Common items such as pipes, rolling papers, small medicine bottles, eye drops, or butane lighters in your child's possession may signal that your child is using drugs.

Even when the signs are obvious, you may still not want to admit that your child may be consuming alcohol and other drugs. It's common for a parent to feel anger, resentment, guilt, or even a sense of failure as a parent.

My message to you is simple—do not allow anger, resentment, guilt, or a sense of failure as a parent paralyze you if you discover that your child is consuming alcohol and other drugs. Don't blame yourself. Take action! Get help for your entire family to deal with what you've discovered if you deem it necessary. The earlier an alcohol and other drugs problem is discovered and confronted, the better able your entire family can be helped.

If and when you need to confront your child, do not confront him if he's under the influence of alcohol and other drugs. Wait until he's sober. Then discuss your concerns. Once you do express your concerns, do so calmly and objectively.

Remember, if you've previously articulated consequences for violation of your family's rules about underage family members not consuming alcohol and other drugs, impose those consequences. Don't relent, no matter how much pressure you may experience to do so.

It's common for people to lie about their alcohol and other drugs consumption. If you think your child is not being truthful and the evidence is pretty strong that she's consuming alcohol and other drugs, you may wish to have your child evaluated by a qualified healthcare professional experienced in assessing and diagnosing adolescents with alcohol and other drugs problems.

If your child has developed a pattern of alcohol and other drugs consumption, you'll probably need help to intervene. If you do not know about drug treatment programs in your area, call your doctor, local hospital, or county mental health society for a referral. Your school district should have a substance abuse coordinator or a counselor who can refer you to treatment programs, too. Parents whose children have been through treatment programs can also provide information. Not only that, they'll help you deal with the feelings and get you through the process with your sanity intact.

For a list of what to do and what not to do if you suspect that your child is consuming alcohol and other drugs, see the following Bridge Builder's Checklist.

Bridge Builder's Checklist

What to do and what not to do if your child is consuming alcohol and other drugs.

- 1) Don't punish, threaten, bribe, or preach to your child.

- 2) Don't be a martyr.
- 3) Avoid emotional appeals that may only increase feelings of shame and guilt within your child.
- 4) Don't cover-up, make excuses, or shield your child from the realistic consequences of his behavior.
- 5) Don't hide or dump bottles, throw out drugs, or keep secret that your child is consuming alcohol and other drugs.
- 6) Don't argue with your child if and when they're impaired or high.
- 7) Don't feel guilty or responsible for your child's behavior.
- 8) Act in a loving, compassionate manner towards your child as you determine whether or not your child is consuming alcohol and other drugs.
- 9) Remain calm, unemotional, and factually honest in speaking about your child's behavior and its day-to-day consequences.
- 10) Let your child know that you're learning about alcohol and other drugs abuse.
- 11) Discuss the situation with someone you trust—someone from the clergy, a social worker, a counselor, a friend, or some individual who has experienced alcohol or other drugs abuse personally or as a family member.
- 12) Hire a qualified healthcare provider to educate your family about alcohol and other drugs abuse and dependence.
- 13) Hire a qualified healthcare provider to inform you about and assist you in confronting your child's behavior.

- 14) Hire a qualified healthcare provider to counsel your child and/or your family.
- 15) Maintain a healthy atmosphere in the home.
- 16) Continue to educate your child about the nature of alcohol and other drugs abuse.
- 17) Encourage new interests and participate in leisure time activities that your child enjoys.
- 18) Encourage your child to see old friends.
- 19) Stick to the game plan presented in this book.
- 20) Be patient. Accept setbacks and relapses with calmness and understanding.

Be sure to read Appendix G and Appendix H of this book to learn more about the signs of teens consuming alcohol and other drugs.

