

Early Detection of Substance Abuse: Understanding your older teen's/young adult's well-being

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Here are some questions to ask yourself as you look to protect your older teen/young adult.

PHYSICAL

Have you seen any **physical changes** such as weight loss, changes in hair, skin, hygiene or general interest in their own appearance?

Any changes in their **diet, physical activity, or sleep schedule**, be it an increase or decrease?

Any complaints about any illnesses more so than usual, such as **stomach aches, tooth aches, mouth sores, headaches or coughs**?

AFFECTIVE

Has the way your child copes with feelings changed? For example, did they once come to you or a loved one to talk about their feelings and now **they isolate themselves**?

Did they typically process on their own by exercising, cleaning, coloring, or listening to music and are **no longer engaging in those activities**?

Have you noticed them **stressing over things** that once were not a concern?

COGNITIVE

Any change in their **academic performance** (positive or negative)? If so, is it paired with a change in their study skills pattern, a lack of interest, difficulty **keeping up with the demands** of the current school year?

Have you noticed a **change in their responsiveness** to conversations at home such as difficulty remaining focused during conversations, difficulty remembering events, conversations or tasks given?

ECONOMIC

Have you noticed a change in their **requests for money/allowance**? Are they asking more or less frequently? Are you seeing them with things that you did not purchase or even seeing that you've given money but there seems **no evidence of where it's been spent**?

How **drastic** do these changes feel for you?

SOCIAL

Have you seen any **changes in their peer group**, for example, have they let go of what were long lasting friendships?

Are there friends who **no longer wish to include them**?

Have you noticed a **change in their value system**, such as no longer enjoying activities, music or clothing they now may deem "childish"?

Have you **caught them lying** about who they were communicating with or spending time with?

HOW DRASTIC DO THESE CHANGES FEEL FOR YOU?

Not at all, I think they are age appropriate.

Continue to get to know your child in all these areas to establish a working baseline to monitor for changes.

Speak as a family to establish the firm, fair and consistent consequences of unhealthy decisions and risky behavior.

Discuss boundary setting in relationships to ensure that your child feels comfortable saying “no” to their peers.

Talk about risky behavior and how your child and their friend group feel about them including substances.

Mild, I think they will stabilize with time.

Schedule a physical to establish a baseline

Speak openly about how each of you manage difficult emotions & who everyone uses as support.

Talk about how they feel about increased academic demands and ask if they’re comfortable asking for help.

Be sure to respond to all unwanted behavior with firm, fair, & consistent follow through.

Explore with your child how they feel about their changing peer groups, are they sad to lose some friends, are they at peace with their choices? How do they decide which relationships to invest in?

Moderate & concerning, I would like to learn more

Call the school to inquire as to what they’ve observed at school.

Explore your child’s study habits to ensure that they are appropriately challenged academically without also being overly taxed beyond their resources.

Establish a system of accountability for money management to help you monitor effectively.

Inquire about new relationships and ask questions about who is initiating these changes and why?

Ask how this new friend group feels about risky behavior such as substance use.

Very concerning, I would like to address them

Schedule a full physical

Schedule to meet with a mental health professional for individual and/or family therapy.

Schedule to meet with the school to discuss options to course correct & re-engage in academic success.

Speak to your child about their peer group & what types of activities they engage to create social bonding? Challenge if those activities are unhealthy and unproductive.

Explore productive activities that support well-being & your child’s willingness to engage in these activities

Extremely drastic and I am very worried.

Contact your child’s physician for a follow up.

Contact a mental health professional for a thorough evaluation of the level of care.

The strategies for intervening on the disease of addiction often go against natural parenting instincts. Schedule to meet with a mental health expert who specializes in addiction to understand the strategies that will be most effective and process what may interfere with your ability to follow through on them.