



SIGNS OF DRUG USE

A Guide For Teachers



You Are On The Front Lines



As educators, you are on the front lines of observing student behavior, and your role in identifying potential signs of drug abuse is critical. While many changes in teenagers' behavior are a normal part of adolescence, certain patterns may indicate a deeper issue, such as drug abuse. Being able to recognize these signs can help you intervene early and potentially connect students with the support they need.

Changes in Academic Performance

Decline in Grades

A noticeable drop in academic performance can be an early sign. Students who were previously engaged and attentive may start failing to turn in assignments or performing poorly on tests.

Decreased Focus and Motivation

Teens abusing drugs may show a lack of interest in subjects they once enjoyed or become easily distracted during class.

Behavioral Changes

Mood Swings or Irritability

Teens may exhibit sudden and extreme mood changes, becoming angry, defensive, or withdrawn without a clear cause.

Rebellious Behavior

An increase in rule-breaking, defiance, or general rebelliousness, especially when it is out of character, can be an indicator of underlying issues.

Increased Absenteeism

Frequent absences, tardiness, or an unusual desire to leave class frequently may be an effort to hide drug use or its effects.

Physical Signs

Changes in Appearance

Sudden changes in grooming habits, poor hygiene, or a disheveled appearance may indicate that a student is struggling.

Red or Glazed Eyes

Drug use can cause students' eyes to appear red, bloodshot, or glazed over. They may also use eye drops excessively to cover it up.

Weight Loss or Gain

Unexplained changes in weight can be a sign of drug use, particularly with stimulants or depressants.

Social and Emotional Shifts

Withdrawal from Friends or Activities

If a student starts distancing themselves from long-term friends or previously enjoyed activities, this can be a warning sign.

New Peer Groups

A sudden change in friend groups, particularly if the new peers seem to be involved in risky behavior, is another red flag.

Secrecy and Lying

Teens abusing drugs may become secretive about their activities, where they go, or who they are with. You might notice them lying more frequently, even about small things.

Warning Signs In Communication

Slurred or Incoherent Speech

Drug use can sometimes cause students to slur their words or speak in a way that is unclear or jumbled.

Disengagement in Class Discussions

If a student who was once vocal in class becomes disengaged, uninterested, or struggles to follow the conversation, this can be a sign of substance abuse.

Paraphernalia and Substance Related Smells

Possession of Drug-Related Items

If you notice items such as lighters, rolling papers, or vape pens, these could be signs of drug use. Additionally, strong smells such as the odor of marijuana may be present on their clothes or in their belongings.

Unusual Scents

Many drugs have distinctive odors. If a student frequently smells of chemicals, alcohol, or smoke, it may be time to investigate further.

What You Can Do As A Teacher



Observe and Document

Take note of any recurring patterns of behavior or physical signs that concern you. Keep a record to discuss with a school counselor or administrator if needed.

Approach with Care

If you feel comfortable, approach the student privately in a non-judgmental way. Sometimes simply offering to listen can make a big difference.

Notify the Right People

If you suspect drug use, it's essential to inform the appropriate staff, such as the school counselor or a designated administrator, who can take the next steps in addressing the issue. Your observations can play a crucial role in identifying and helping students who may be facing drug abuse. Being vigilant and compassionate in your approach can make a significant difference in their lives



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