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Alcohol, Drugs and Youth

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There is no single age group of people more affected by alcohol and drugs than young people. In some ways it feels like it is an issue everywhere: for you, your family and your friends. Plain and simple, try as you might, you cannot escape the issues of alcohol and drugs.

Nationwide, alcohol and drugs affect each and every one of us, directly or indirectly: in our homes, in our families, in our school, in our dorm, in our community, town or city.

FACT: More than 23 million people over the age of 12 are addicted to alcohol and other drugs affecting millions more people -- parents, family members, friends and neighbors.

For some, one time or infrequent use of alcohol or drugs can result in tragedy: alcohol overdose (alcohol poisoning), an accident or fall when under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or an arrest associated with alcohol or drugs that may cost you your reputation and/or your freedom. For others, even though they may not use alcohol or drugs, they could become a victim of an alcohol or drug-related crime. And, for yet others, what may have started as occasional use can turn into an addiction that presents extraordinary health concerns with potentially grave and tragic consequences.

Age of first use of alcohol and drugs

Using alcohol and drugs before the brain has fully developed increases your risk for future addiction to alcohol and drugs dramatically. Young people who start drinking alcohol before age 15 are 5 times more likely to develop alcohol abuse or dependence than people who first used alcohol at age 21 or older. Research for drug use and drug addiction has found similar results.

Family history of alcoholism or drug addiction

Whether a person decides to use alcohol or drugs is a choice, influenced by their environment--peers, family, and availability. But, once a person uses alcohol or drugs, the risk of developing alcoholism or drug dependence is largely influenced by genetics.

Alcoholism and drug dependence are not moral issues, are not a matter of choice or a lack

of willpower. Plain and simple, people's bodies respond to the effects of alcohol and drugs differently. If you have a family history of alcoholism or addiction, you are four times more likely to develop a problem.

Do I have a problem?

Are you concerned about the role alcohol plays in your life? Take this simple [self-test for teenagers \(/get-help/take-the-test/self-test-for-teenagers\)](#), to help you determine if you or someone you know needs to find out more about alcoholism. This test does not include drugs. To take a self-test focused specifically on drug use, take the quiz, [Am I Drug Addicted? \(/get-help/take-the-test/am-i-drug-addicted\)](#).

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