

### OTHER TITLES

#### Create It

*Teaching your children to talk about their feelings*

*How can I help my young child learn to get along with others?*

*If you're a parent, you're a role model: How to teach your children by example*

#### Nurture It

*How can I teach my young child to deal with peer pressure?*

*Teaching your children the truth about drugs and gambling*

*How can I help my young child to be more confident?*

*How to listen actively to your children*

#### Choose It

*How can I help my child if my partner is addicted?*

*Helping your teen work through anger*

*The truth about popular drugs*

*How do I know if my teen is using drugs?*

*How do I talk to my teenager about drugs?*

*Raves and club drugs: How do I protect my kids?*

#### Get It Back

*Helping teens evaluate their drug use*

*How bad is my teen's drinking or drug use?*

*Does your teen's drug use leave you feeling like you're losing your sanity?*

*How to get through to your teen*

*Intervening when your teen is using drugs*

*Getting help for your son or daughter who is drinking, using other drugs or gambling*

*Supporting your son or daughter in recovery*

YOU'RE WORRIED that your son or daughter might have a drug problem and most of the time when you try to talk about it, you end up arguing and getting nowhere.

We understand your frustration. It's hard to see your kids doing things you don't feel good about. It can be even harder helping them to see a problem when they don't think there is one. Don't give up. You can get through to your son or daughter.

Often, it can feel like you and your teen are in opposite corners—more like adversaries than partners. This usually happens because you are trying to get your son or daughter to see your point of view. Your intentions are good, but sometimes your approach prevents your teen from being able to really hear you.

If you want to get through to your son or daughter, you will have to step back and try not to let your emotions get in the way of what you want to say. You might start by saying something like, "I'm not an expert and I don't know if you have a problem or not. That's something that you will need to decide for yourself or with a counsellor. Because I am concerned about you, I've been doing my homework and learning everything I can about what a problem looks like. You're absolutely right—not everybody who uses has a problem. Maybe you don't, but maybe you do."

You may be more successful in talking with your son or daughter if you learn from the approach a counsellor would take. If your son or daughter talked with a counsellor, the two of them would look at four basic things:

1. **Tolerance:** The counsellor will ask how much the teen is using and whether the amount the youth has used to feel high is increasing or decreasing since they first started. A change in how the body handles a drug is one of the signs that someone may be using too much.

2. **Physical dependence:** The counsellor asks several questions to determine whether the teen has developed physical dependence. What happens to the teen when they are coming down from the high or sobering up from the drunk? Are they experiencing hangovers? How bad are the hangovers?

3. **Psychological dependence:** Does the teen think they function better when they are high or that they need a drink in order to face certain people or situations? These are signs of psychological dependence.

4. **Effects of use:** How is the alcohol or other drug use affecting major life areas such as family, school, job and relationships? A counsellor would also look at the opposite side of this question—what's going on in the major areas of the teen's life that is contributing to the alcohol or other drug use? This link between use and effects is probably the most important point to consider.

It's important to know that a kid can have a problem without being physically addicted to a drug. Some teens are able to see the problems that their use is creating and stop because they don't want the problems to continue. They might choose to stop using long before they become hooked, physically or psychologically.

## Reality bites

Let's be realistic. Your teen is not going to agree to see a counsellor just because you want it. In fact, if the teen doesn't see a problem, he or she will probably resist this idea pretty forcefully! That doesn't mean that you should give up.

## What does work?

Talk to your son or daughter as if your role was to coach or guide them. Work with them instead of against them. Remember that your role has changed—you are no longer there to order, direct and protect the same way you did when they were little. You now have an opportunity to take a different approach to being a parent.

The activity page opposite gives you a starting place for talking to your teen. You might try saying something like, "Let's talk about where you are right now and then you can decide whether there is a problem." The activity sheet can help you explore the four things a counsellor would talk to them about, but don't feel that you have to go through all of them—not unless you know enough about the drug, for example, to know what a change in tolerance means about that particular drug. Probably the easiest and most productive area to focus on is the effects on major life areas.

Remember that your discussion might go along smoothly for awhile and then get derailed! If you or your teen gets angry or upset, stop the discussion for now. The problem didn't develop in one day and it won't be resolved that quickly either. It's better to take two steps forward and feel good about the progress you have made than it is to push too hard and end up taking three steps back. You had a good relationship with your teen once, and with patience, you can get it back.

If you don't get anywhere after trying a few times, you might want to talk to a counsellor. A counsellor can help you work through your frustration, and can offer tips and ideas about how to communicate with your son or daughter.

It's really important not to try the discussion if you are angry or disappointed with your son or daughter because of something they just did. Don't try to talk to your teen if they are under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. Instead, pick a day when you are both calm.

## For more information

We understand that everyone's needs are different. Whether you want to prevent your child from using alcohol, tobacco or other drugs, or you want to help your child deal with a drug problem, we can help. Information and prevention programs, group and family counselling, outpatient and residential treatment, and the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs program are offered by Alberta Health Services and its funded services to help your child and your family.

For more information and to find an addiction services office near you, please call the 24-hour Helpline at 1-866-332-2322.

## Activity Page

### Effects on major life areas

Tip: Draw a diagram with your son or daughter while you talk.  
Use the one below as a sample:

#### Major life areas



Finances



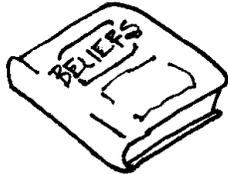
Friends



Family



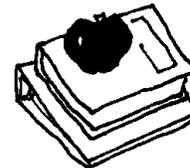
Physical Health



Conscience/Values/Spirituality



Emotional Health



School



Law



Girlfriend/  
Boyfriend



Job

#### Key questions:

- What effects is your alcohol or other drug use having on the major areas of your life?
- What's going on in the major areas of your life that contributes to your drug use?
- Do you see any links between your use and what is going on in your life?

A substantial effect on one or more major life areas or lots of problems in your teen's life that result in drug use are often the most powerful indicators of a problem.

#### Tolerance

##### Key questions:

- Is the amount you are using increasing over time? Do you need more and more of the drug to feel the same effect?
- Can you "hold" more than your friends can—drink or use more than they do?
- Have you ever found that you need to use less to feel the effect? For example, can you get feeling really good on two drinks when it used to take you five?

“Yes” answers to these questions might indicate that tolerance is increasing or decreasing and this can be one sign of a problem. Remember, this is only one factor in looking at whether a problem is present. Not everybody experiences increased tolerance.

### **Dependence**

Key questions:

- What happens to you when you stop using—the morning after, for example?
- What kinds of things happen to your body when you stop drinking or taking the drug—loss of appetite, increase in appetite, trouble sleeping, sleeping excessively, headaches, throwing up, shakes, being really thirsty? Or maybe it’s the mood changes—feeling really weepy or really cranky or just wanting to stay away from people?

The answers to these questions can indicate that physical dependence to the alcohol or other drugs is starting to happen. For the first question, signs of withdrawal indicate physical dependence. Withdrawal signs differ according to the drug.

If you are concerned about alcohol use, you will also want to ask:

- Are you having blackouts—not being able to remember certain periods of time from the night before or how you got home? Blackouts can range from a few minutes to many hours. Blackouts are different from passing out. A person who is experiencing a blackout is usually participating in whatever is going on around them—they just don’t remember it.

### **Ending well**

Be patient. You have worked very hard to get to this point. You will not likely sort everything out in one day. Know when to say “when” and stop. If you have been able to have a good and honest conversation with your son or daughter, you are getting through. Give it time to sink in. Let your son or daughter know you are there to support any decision made regarding problem use.

### **Getting help**

If your teens recognize that drug use is a problem or start to wonder if it is becoming a problem, suggest that they talk to a counsellor. Our services are confidential. Offer to go with them, but respect their decisions if they choose to go alone. Remember that you can talk to a counsellor even if your son or daughter chooses not to.