



The Reality of Adolescent Substance Use

The idea that 'everyone is doing it,' feels true to the adolescent but is likely to be inaccurate. Teens often feel as though more of their peers are engaging in risky behaviors than studies show to be true.

'Pluralistic ignorance' is a phenomenon that may be at work. This is defined as a perception that grossly overestimates how many peers are drinking, smoking, and becoming sexual. Surveys show that adolescents exaggerate what their peers are doing by more than two times. They firmly believe that everyone is having more fun and not suffering the consequences. This belief makes change more difficult.

Social Media Distorts Reality

Even with all their communication (texting, tweeting, calling, emailing, and talking) teens perceive the actions of their group leader as the norm. Actually, the group leader is typically engaged in more risky behaviors than most of their peers. This distortion of the true nature of substance use means teens are getting some misinformation.

Adolescents brag about certain behaviors but are silent about things they don't do. This behavior helps distort reality. It also perpetuates the misperceptions. Teens act the way they *believe* their

peers are acting to avoid rejection. Bronson and Merryman report, "Scholars have repeatedly found that kids' perception of how much their friends are smoking or using drugs and alcohol is a better predictor of the kids' future use than their friends' actual use."

This adolescent belief provides us with a new perspective. It also helps us intervene by acknowledging their beliefs and providing alternatives to the obvious misperceptions. This becomes a key concept in adolescent substance use treatment. This is one starting place to engage teens who struggle to let go of this way to relieve pain or find pleasure.

What's the Truth?

Click on the links for below for PDF versions:

[Teens and Marijuana: What's the Truth?](#)

[Teens and Alcohol: Why is there Concern?](#)

Teens and Marijuana: What's the Truth?

How Many Teens Really Use?

Grade	Non Users	Lifetime Use	30 Day Use
12th Graders	44.4%	21.2%	6.6%
10th Graders	33.7%	16.6%	6.6%
8th Graders	15.6%	6.6%	6.6%

● Non Users ● Lifetime Use ● 30 Day Use
 Lifetime Use = Using at least once during your life
 30 Day Use = Using at least once in the last 30 days

Teens In Need:

10% of teens are in need of treatment for substance use

90% of teens who need treatment never get

Marijuana Causes Many Negative Effects in Teens:

Increases In:

- Risky Sexual Behavior
- Impulsivity
- Withdrawal
- Negative Affect (Mood)
- Cravings with Cues

Decreases In:

- IQ
- Executive Function
- Decision Making
- Attention
- Cognitive Processing Speed
- Verbal Memory

Because teen brains are not fully developed, there is no safe level of marijuana use for teens.

Monitoring the Future 2014, CASA 2011

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Teens and Alcohol: Why is There Concern?

ALCOHOL

The substance most commonly used by teens.

By senior year, 66% of teens have tried alcohol.

Monitoring the Future 2014

Under-age alcohol-impaired drivers caused 706 crashes in Ohio in 2015 - 23 included fatalities.

www.publicsafety.ohio.gov

BINGE DRINKING

12th graders reported that for the two weeks before the survey:

19.4% drank 5 drinks within 2 hrs. at least

7.1% drank 10 drinks within 2 hrs. at least

Heavy alcohol use can affect normal brain development, especially in the frontal regions of the brain.

The effects on girls were even more pronounced than for boys.

Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research July 18, 2011

EFFECTS

Teen drinkers are more likely to:

- Be involved in violent behaviors and crimes
- Have lasting health effects
- Experience clinical depression
- Develop alcohol dependence later on
- Experience anxiety
- Be involved in traffic accidents
- Attempt suicide
- Be victimized
- Engage in risky sexual behaviors

Teens who drink more (by amount and frequency), are more likely to experience these consequences.

Teens who have been drinking may need help to stop, especially if they have experienced any of

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

SOLUTION

How do we help teens make better choices?

INCREASE PERCEPTION OF HARM

21% of 12th graders associate great risk of harm with having 1-2 drinks daily. 45% for binge drinking (5+ drinks) on weekends.

EDUCATE TEENS

Peer-to-peer education and group education for teens who have used a few times can reduce use.

Teen drinking and drugging are very harmful.

When adolescents perceive harm in an activity, fewer engage in the activity.

Monitoring the Future 2014