



Why Teens Use Drugs

There are many reasons why teens use drugs. Some may just experiment, others continue using and develop problems. Understanding why teens choose to use drugs can help you understand how to avoid making these choices yourself.



To fit in.

Teens often use drugs because they want to fit in with their friends or larger peer group. Sometimes just believing that others are using is enough to get a teen to try alcohol or other drugs (AOD). Research has found that teens are more likely to try AOD if their closer friends are using compared to their larger peer group.



To feel good.

Abused drugs interact with brain chemistry to produce feelings of pleasure. The intensity of this euphoric feeling (high) differs by the type of drug and the method of use. Longer term use can change the way people experience pleasure in every day life, so normal activities don't seem like as much fun. This is one of the reasons people keep using drugs.



To feel better.

We get calls every week from parents whose teens are “self medicating.” These teens are experiencing anxiety, depression, stress-related disorders, or physical pain. They are using illegal drugs (or legal drugs off of a prescription) to attempt to lessen these feelings. Stress plays a large role in starting and continuing drug use. It is also a risk factor for relapses. Dealing with stress is a large focus in treatment and during recovery.



To do better.

Adolescents are under major pressure to perform well in school and sports. Some teens may try drugs that they believe will help enhance their abilities. Some teens use illegal stimulants or prescription medications (for which they do not have a prescription) like ADHD medications or steroids.



To try something new.

Adolescents' brains are particularly wired to enjoy new experiences. This is helpful as we send young adults out into the world, but it can be difficult for teens to set their own limits based on making safe choices. Trying new (safe) experiences which may help you and your friends avoid the desire to try illegal substances.

If most teens try drugs, what can be done?

While many teens use drugs once or twice, it is uncommon for teens to use often or regularly. Whether a teen you know is using sporadically or frequently, help is available. Adolescent Substance Abuse Programs offers a comprehensive [intake/assessment](#) process to determine what level of care is most appropriate for each client.