

Has a friend become moody, short-tempered, and hostile? Does he seem "spaced out?" Is she suddenly failing courses and hanging out with kids you don't trust?

Stop and think about it. Your friend may have an alcohol or other drug problem.

Here are some additional signs of drug or alcohol abuse:

- Increased interest in alcohol or other drugs; talking about them, talking about buying them.
- Owning drug paraphernalia, such as pipes, hypodermic needles, or rolling papers.
- Having large amounts of cash or always being low on cash.
- Drastic increase or decrease in weight.
- Slurred or incoherent speech.
- Withdrawal from others, frequent lying, depression, paranoia.
- Dropping out of school activities.

If your friend acts this way, it is not a guarantee that he or she has an alcohol or other drug problem. You need to compare behavior now to behavior in the past. But it's better to say something and be wrong than to say nothing and find out later that you were right to be worried.

How to talk to a friend who's in trouble

- Plan ahead what you want to say and how you want to say it.
- Pick a quiet and private time to talk.
- Don't try to talk about the problem when your friend is drunk or high.
- Use a calm voice and don't get into an argument with your friend.

- Let your friend know that you care.
- Ask if there is anything you can do to help. Find out about local hotlines and drug-abuse counseling and offer to go along with him or her.
- Don't expect your friend to like what you're saying. But stick with it—the more people who express concern, the better the chances of your friend getting help.
- Remember—it's not your job to get people to stop using drugs. Only they can decide to stop.

Take control of your life and decide not to use drugs!

- Look for help. Talk about the situation with someone who knows about drug abuse and helping abusers.
- Skip parties where you know there will be alcohol or other drugs.
- Hang out with friends who don't need alcohol or other drugs to have fun.
- Get involved with drug-free activities. Ask your friends to join.

Take a stand!

- Remind friends that buying or possessing illegal drugs is against the law. Penalties for drug-related offenses are harsh and can include loss of benefits like student loans.
- Remind friends that using intravenous drugs places them at risk of getting AIDS.
- Organize drug-free activities (dances, movies, community service projects, walk-a-thons or marathons, etc.) to raise money for charities.

- Use plays, songs, and raps to show younger children the consequences of drug abuse.
- Organize an anti-drug rally.
- Tell the police, a teacher, or parents about drug dealers in your school or community. Many areas have telephone numbers to let people report these crimes anonymously.
- If your school doesn't have an alcohol or other drug-abuse prevention program, start one.
- Check recreation centers, youth clubs, libraries, or schools to see if they offer after-school activities—tutoring, sports, study time, craft classes. What about a community-improvement project that young people can design and carry out?