
For Teens: Understand the Cycle of Addiction

Drugs lie. They promise that you'll be independent and feel good. But they give you something quite different. They make you dependent on the drugs. That doesn't feel good at all. Alcohol, the nicotine in cigarettes, marijuana, cocaine . . . each is a drug. Each can lead you along the same addiction process. It all seems so innocent those first few times—until you're hooked. Some people will become addicted quicker than others. It's important not to compare usage among your peers.

Trying it out

Experimentation means you try drinking or using a drug out of curiosity. You want to see what it's all about. Most kids try alcohol and drugs with friends or an older sibling. Sometimes peer pressure is used to get kids to try alcohol or drugs.

Misuse

Misuse means you use a drug to cope with certain situations. Some kids think using drugs will help them have more friends, do better in school, or at sports. "Weekend partyers" may think a drug helps them relax or forget problems.

Abuse

Abuse means you use a drug out of habit, regardless of the situation. Some kids use a drug just to get through the day. They think they need the drug, even though they know it's causing problems.

You're hooked

Addiction means you're hooked both body and mind. Addiction is a medical disorder that affects the brain and changes behavior. Kids who are addicted can't stop using their drug even when they want to. Even when they realize the harm it causes. And use it on a regular basis (whether that's every weekend, every day, or several times a day). They continue using despite the emotional, physical, social, and financial costs that occur.

To learn more

- SAMHSA National Helpline at findtreatment.gov or at 800-662-4357
- National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD) or at 800-475-4673