

Children's Mental Health Matters!

a Maryland public awareness campaign

Facts For Educators

Substance Use

In 2013, the National Institute on Drug Abuse found that approximately 8.5 percent of all 8th graders, 19.4 percent of all 10th graders and 25.5 percent of all 12th graders have tried an illegal drug. Drug use may be higher among kids who have dropped out of school. Sixty percent of high school seniors do not view regular marijuana use as harmful, which is nearly double from 30 years ago. After marijuana, prescription and over-the-counter medications account for most of the top drugs abused by 12th graders in the past year. Studies show that 39.2 percent of high school seniors have used alcohol. About 4 in 10 people who begin drinking before age 15 eventually become alcoholics. Other psychiatric disorders often coexist with substance use problems and need assessment and treatment. Adolescents who abuse drugs often act out, do poorly academically, and drop out of school. They are at risk for unplanned pregnancies, violence, and infectious diseases. As a teacher who spends a lot of time with kids, you can play a critical role in helping to identify and get help for those students at risk for or engaged in alcohol or drug use.

Why is this important?

Drugs and alcohol contribute to a host of problems for our children, including:

- Poor academic performance
- Memory and learning problems
- Truancy and absenteeism
- Problems with family and peer relationships and a lack of empathy for others
- A tendency to engage in other risky activities and to feel invulnerable
- An increased risk for moving on to more dangerous drugs, and developing dependency or addiction

While all children are at risk of using drugs and alcohol, the following risk factors significantly increase the chance that a child will develop a serious alcohol or drug problem:

- Having a family history of substance use, dependency or addiction
- Experiencing emotional or psychological problems
- Low self-esteem
- Not feeling connected to family, school or community

What can educators do about it?

Research has documented that family involvement and classroom-based prevention programs are the most effective means of addressing substance use among youth.

- Watch for signs of substance use:
 - Moodiness or irritability
 - Argumentative, disruptive, rule-breaking behavior
 - Sudden mood or personality changes
 - Low self-esteem or depression
 - Poor judgment; irresponsible behavior
 - Social withdrawal; pulling away from family
 - Change in former activities or friends
 - General lack of interest
- Discuss the situation with the child's parents or caregiver.
- Notify the appropriate school staff (e.g., school counselor or mental health provider, school principal) if you suspect a student is using drugs or alcohol.
- Let your students know that you do not approve of drug or alcohol use. Develop a personal relationship with your students, and share your concerns about their safety and well-being.
- Create a positive classroom environment where students feel comfortable talking

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coordinated by

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with you and sharing feelings. Listen carefully to what they are telling you, and let them know that you are a resource of support if they should need it.

- Encourage students to develop different ways to refuse substance use. Examples include:
 - Switching topic (“Hey, did you hear about the game last night?”)
 - Using an excuse (“I can’t, I’m meeting a friend in 10 minutes”)
 - Put the “blame” on others/parents (“My mom would kill me if she found out”)
 - Walk away
 - State the facts (“No thanks, I’ve read about what drugs can do to your body”)
- Educate yourself. Seek out resources that give current information regarding what drugs are out there and specific signs of use. Children are beginning to use at younger ages and teachers often spend more time with students than their parents. It is important to be up to date to ensure the safety of your students.
- Educate your students. Give them factual information about drugs and alcohol. It is important to challenge myths and to give them accurate information about the dangers of substance use.
- Remind your students that they will be reported if they come to school in possession of drugs or alcohol, or under their influence.
- Let your students know that you will contact their parents if you suspect drug or alcohol use. Follow through on parent contact should the need arise, but let students know that you will be contacting their parents so as not to violate their trust.
- Discuss your concerns and possible responses with your principal or other school administrators.

Resources/Links

Building Blocks for a Healthy Future A website developed by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) with practical information about helping your preschool and elementary school-aged children make good choices and develop a healthy lifestyle:

<http://www.bblocks.samhsa.gov/Educators/>

National Institute on Drug Abuse: Provides links to facts on specific drugs for parents and teachers as well as age appropriate curriculum regarding drug education.

<http://www.nida.nih.gov/parent-teacher.html>

National Council on Alcohol and Drug Dependence is particularly focused on alcohol use and abuse. For a list of specific signs that a student may be in trouble with alcohol:
<https://ncadd.org/index.php/for-parents-overview/what-to-look-for>

Monitoring the Future is an annual survey, under a grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse, of 8th, 10th, and 12th graders measuring drug, alcohol, and cigarette used and related attitudes nationwide.

<http://www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/trends-statistics/infographics/monitoring-future-2013-survey-results>

Adapted from Resources found on:

www.schoolmentalhealth.org

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MHAMD ~ 443-901-1550 ~ www.mhamd.org

MCF ~ 410-730-8267 ~ www.mdcoalition.org

The Children’s Mental Health Matters! Campaign is a collaboration of the Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) and the Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) with support from the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene - Behavioral Health Administration. The Campaign goal, with over 250 partners and schools across the state, is to raise public awareness of the importance of children’s mental health. For more information, please visit www.ChildrensMentalHealthMatters.org.