

Youth Mental Health Factsheet

Substance Use Problem

What is a substance use problem?

Different substances affect the brain in different ways and people use these substances for the resulting effects, such as a temporary increase in positive emotions or a decrease in negative thinking. A substance use problem involves the use of too much alcohol, tobacco or other drugs – what “too much” looks like, will differ from person to person.

Young people may experiment with these substances once or twice, or they may develop a pattern of increased use. Whilst under the influence young people are more likely to engage in higher risk behaviours and get into harmful situations¹ Approximately 12.7% of Australians aged 16-24 have a substance use disorder.²

Signs you may have a substance abuse problem are:

- You require larger quantities of a substance are needed to get the same effect previously experienced.
- You have cravings to use a substance.
- Your ability to work, do school work, or regularly activities has decreased. You find it hard to concentrate and remember things.
- You experience withdrawal symptoms if you try and stop using the substance.
- The substance becomes your priority over relationships and other commitments.

What you may notice if someone is misusing alcohol or drugs:

- Increased secrecy and avoiding questions about where they are going and who they are with.
- Appears to be hungover.
- Takes alcohol from their parent’s liquor cabinet.
- Eats a lot of snack foods. This can be a sign of cannabis use.
- Money is spent quickly with nothing to show for it and they cant explain where it went..
- A decline in school work, concentration or even missing school.
- Increased social activity with friends who also use substances.
- Uses substances to get intoxicated rather than experiment.

“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

1 Peter 5:8

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What is a substance use problem

Any substance use by an adolescent should be thought of as a problem. Substance use can have harmful effects on an adolescent's brain development, mental health and increase their risk-taking behaviours. Statistics show that early substance use increases the risk of developing an addiction and other mental disorders such as anxiety, depression and psychotic disorders.

Risk factors for substance abuse

There are many risk factors when it comes to an adolescent trying alcohol or drugs. These include:

- **Decision to try substances:**
This may be due to peer and cultural groups, marketing within the media and parental attitude towards alcohol or drugs.
- **Adolescents using heavily:**
Emotional & psychological problems, behaviour issues, no community or family support, and a family history of substance use problems.
- **Substance use disorders:**
Family use, social disadvantages, early use of alcohol, genetics and other mental health problems.

How can I help myself?

Though it is common for people with mental health problems and illnesses to self-medicate with alcohol and/or drugs, it doesn't help the issue and will make it worse. It may be difficult, but you need to stop using these substances straight away.

The following services will be able to provide you with more information and support:

- **www.counsellingonline.org.au**
This is a free online text-based counselling service for those with drug and alcohol users, as well as their family and friends.
- **au.reachout.com**
While this website covers many mental health issues, it also has great resources for alcohol and drug use.

**“Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery.
Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”**

Ephesians 5:18