



## PATHWAY CLINIC

*comprehensive treatment for mental health*

# **Teenage Substance Abuse**

Among teenagers (and adults, for that matter), alcohol is by far the most popular substance of abuse. Besides alcohol, other substances teenagers abuse include tobacco; illegal drugs (marijuana, cocaine and crack, "speed," LSD, heroin, etc.); and prescription drugs taken without medical supervision ("uppers," "downers," and sleeping pills").

## How common is teenage substance abuse?

Teenage substance abuse is very common, consider the data:

- Seventy percent of all children try cigarettes, 40 percent before they reach high school.
- Nearly all high school seniors have used alcohol, and two-thirds report they have used it in the last month.
- Roughly half of all young people's deaths from drowning, fires, suicide, and homicide are related to alcohol abuse.
- In a survey of 17 thousand seniors in 135 public and private high schools, nearly 33 percent said they had taken at least one illicit drug during the preceding year.

## Teenage Alcohol and Drug Abuse can be Fatal

Adolescents who are high on alcohol or drugs are apt to act impulsively. With their inhibitions loosened, they may take risks they ordinarily wouldn't consider. Alcohol-related accidents are the leading cause of death among youngsters aged 15 to 24 years.

In addition, chemically-loosened inhibitions can prompt a depressed teenager to attempt suicide. Parents should always take a child's talk of suicide seriously, and follow up on it immediately by contacting a medical or mental health professional.

## There is Help...

With the right kind of help, most young abusers can recover from their addictions and get back to the serious business of growing up.

Recovery is a healing process that should involve the whole family. Most young people's recovery programs ask parents and siblings to get involved in educational sessions or family therapy. Introduction into a 12-step support group such as Alcoholic's Anonymous is another important component of an adolescent recovery program.

## What to do if you think your teenager, or someone you know, might have a substance abuse problem?

Even if you only suspect that your teenager might have an alcohol or drug problem, arrange for him or her to undergo a professional evaluation with a licensed physician or psychologist. An evaluation should include a complete physical exam, blood and urine tests, and psychological assessment. With the results of the assessment, the doctor can then recommend the most appropriate form of treatment.

If you suspect that your teenager, or someone you know, has a substance abuse problem, Pathway Clinic can help. If you would like more information or would like to make an appointment, call 608-643-3663.