

Teens and Drug Use

Talking to them
about substance use



  
portage.ca

AGENDA

1. What is addiction?
2. Warning signs of drug use
3. Youth drug trends
4. How to communicate
5. Social media and addiction
6. Portage in Canada
7. Portage School Programs
8. Family services
9. Questions



WHAT IS ADDICTION?

1

A behaviour that interferes with a person's life that they cannot stop on their own.

2

Substance use becomes a problem when it:

- Affects mental or physical health
- Involves breaking the law or puts lives at risk
- Harms relationships with family and friends
- Interferes with work or school
- Threatens financial stability

WHO ARE YOU?



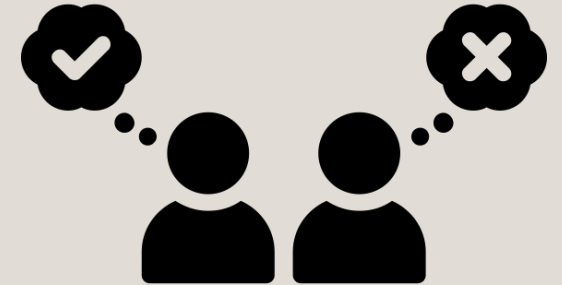
Friend or dictator?
*Your role lies
between the two.*



A parent is neither a friend nor a dictator. The answer is: trust yourself and do your best. Young people need rules, but also freedom. They want to become more autonomous and establish some distance from you, and you must accept it. It all depends on the distance that, in your eyes, seems acceptable. Your opinion matters to them, even if sometimes they tell you otherwise.

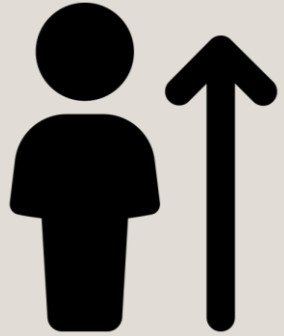
WHO ARE YOU?

Accept that the youth is not us



They are neither as you were nor even what you want them to be. You are the best person/people who know your child. They certainly have some character traits that resemble yours, but he or she is a distinct person trying to find their own identity. In childhood, their identity is closely linked to that of their parents, but in adolescence, they realize that their parents are human, that they are not perfect, and that they are independent and multidimensional beings. They thus experience ambivalence between dependence and independence from their parents. They want to gain autonomy, independence, have more power to act and make decisions, but the family remains central in their life. They must experiment and trial and error to find out who they are. This is the period during which the pieces fall into place. Your role as a parent will evolve once your child reaches adolescence, as young people need rules, but also freedom.

OVERVIEW OF AN ADOLESCENT



Physical Changes

Acceleration of growth / development of breasts, genital organs / appearance of body hair, menstruation, first ejaculation / widening of shoulders and hips, transformation of the voice, etc. They have no power over these changes, yet they must adapt to this new self-image and become very sensitive to the looks or remarks, whether negative or positive, from others. Social media and fashion expose them to stereotypical beauty models and physical ideals that are sometimes inaccessible. Body image can become very important and create dissatisfaction, leading to a decrease in self-esteem and confidence.

OVERVIEW OF AN ADOLESCENT

Hormonal Effects



The impacts of changes include impulsivity, irritability, mood swings, and melatonin levels that directly affect their sleep needs and cycles, attraction to sex and its dangers, and the pursuit of rewards, pleasure, or thrills. **It is essential to remember that the emotions felt by adolescents can be amplified due to significant hormonal changes, and these intensely perceived and experienced emotions can lead them to distort reality.**

OVERVIEW OF AN ADOLESCENT

How their brain works

PREFRONTAL CORTEX



- Allows for inhibiting certain behaviors and making decisions.
- Allows for planning/ organization/ judgment/ regulation and control of emotions.

In teenagers, it is not yet fully developed and continues its development until about 25 years old. The lack of maturity of the prefrontal lobe can explain why teens might misinterpret emotional signals and see anger or hostility where there is none. **DO NOT CONFUSE FACTS WITH PERCEPTIONS.**

OVERVIEW OF AN ADOLESCENT

How their brain works



LIMBIC SYSTEM

- Mood swings
- Attraction to sex, drugs
- Impulsivity/irritability
- Seeking rewards.

If well-developed in adolescence, it's the circuit of pleasure and reward/risk-taking and seeking strong sensations. Hormones can amplify the emotions experienced by adolescents and lead them to distort reality. The gap between the maturation of the limbic system and the prefrontal cortex, added to intense hormonal activity, can explain some characteristics and/or behaviors often attributed to adolescents.

Partly because of this cerebral immaturity, in the eyes of the law, we do not judge teenagers as we judge adults. The two criminal justice systems are distinct, as we attribute a lesser degree of moral culpability to adolescents than we do to adults. Adolescents are more susceptible to external influences, less mature, and their moral judgment is not yet fully developed.

WARNING SIGNS OF DRUG USE

Adolescence is a time where teenagers seek independence and when they want more than ever to be accepted by their peers.

While this is perfectly normal, as parents, it's normal to wonder what types of behaviour need to come into question as indicators that our teens are missing or using drugs

How can we differentiate between average teenage angry behaviour and a drug problem?

Teens generally minimize the significance of changes in behaviour, and they often don't take it very seriously

Here are some warning signs that can help you detect if your child is being an adolescent, or if he might be using drugs.



WARNING SIGNS OF DRUG USE



Change in friends or social activities

Unusual sleep patterns, eating habits
or personal hygiene

Drastic mood swings or irritability



Frequent calls from school or work

Continuous lies

Eye drops, rolling paper, vape, waxpen



Alcohol, money, prescription drugs going
missing from the home

Drops out of school/activity/work/sport
commitments

Running into trouble with law enforcement

WARNING SIGNS OF DRUG USE

Preventative Strategies

- Know your teen's activities.** Pay attention to your teen's whereabouts. Find out what adult-supervised activities your teen is interested in and encourage your teen to get involved.
- Establish rules and consequences.** Explain your family rules, such as leaving a party where drug use occurs and not riding in a car with a driver who's been using drugs. Work with your teen to figure out a plan to get home safely if the person who drove is using substances. If your teen breaks the rules, consistently enforce consequences.
- Know your teen's friends.** If your teen's friends use drugs, your teen might feel pressure to experiment, too.
- Keep track of prescription drugs.** Take an inventory of all prescription and over-the-counter medications in your home.
- Provide support.** Offer praise and encouragement when your teen succeeds. A strong bond between you and your teen might help prevent your teen from using drugs.
- Set a good example.** If you drink, do so in moderation. Use prescription drugs as directed. Don't use illicit drugs.



RECOGNIZING RISKY BEHAVIOUR

Promiscuous Sexual Behaviour
Self Harm
Agression
Withdrawal and Isolation
Anxiety and/or depression

Other warning signs that might be relevant

Whether or not it has to do with substance abuse and addiction, these are some signs to watch out for in teens as it is behaviour that can be indicative of a much larger mental health concern.

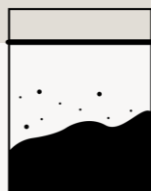
Promiscuous sexualized behaviour – as we can see in adults, youth can also turn to sex work sooner or sustain their substance abuse. A lot of the youth involved in human trafficking do not view themselves as victims but instead as active participants prior to treatment.

As mentioned previously, some of these behaviours are difficult to recognize and differentiate from “normal” teenage behaviours. In my work I often hear parents expressing guilt and shame for not seeing the “signs” sooner or placing blame on themselves for their children’s addictions.

YOUTH DRUG TRENDS



Alcohol
Marijuana
Vapes / wax pens
Nicotine products



Cocaine
Crack
Poppers



Opioids Painkillers
Prescription Dugs



MDMA
Ecstasy
Molly



Lean
Codeine
Cough Syrop



Heroin
Crystal Meth



'Shrooms
LSD

YOUTH DRUG TRENDS

I could really spend all day discussing the different drug types alone, and the impact they have on our young people. What I will begin by saying is that if it can be abused, teenagers can abuse it too.

alcohol and drug related harms remain prevalent in adolescents and young adults. Youth often times do not consider alcohol binges problematic because it is not occurring on a “daily” basis and have a false belief that use is not considered a “problem” unless use has escalated to a daily and constant basis.

cannabis remains the most commonly used illegal substance in Canada. Teenagers are 2x more likely to be using marijuana when compared to adults. Often youth are also not recognizing marijuana use as dangerous or problematic regardless of the frequency and amount being used – often youth smoking marijuana on a daily basis are still stating that the use is not a problem because they do not FEEL dependent on it while using. Therefore, It is important to clearly communicate what we do know about the risks to which young people are exposed when they use cannabis. 1) Cannabis is not a harmless drug; early and frequent use increases the risk for dependence and psychosis. 2) It can be addictive, especially if use starts in adolescence. 3) Early and frequent cannabis use is linked with reduced IQ, lower school performance and increased risk of dropping out.

There is also a widespread concern about the prescription drug crisis that North America currently is facing.

So lets talk drugs!

HOW TO COMMUNICATE

Think first. Act second. Keep an open mind.

1. Produce a plan
2. Create a safe and open environment
3. Communicate respect and safety
4. Actively listen
5. Enforce boundaries



HOW TO COMMUNICATE

Think first. Act second. Keep an open mind.

Create a plan - how and when do you plan on approaching the situation? Reflect on the situation at hand and organize your thoughts. Try to put negative feelings aside during this process and brainstorm what you would like to say to your teen.

Create a safe and open environment - teens are often defensive in these types of situations. Not because of WHAT you're saying but because of WHY THEY THINK you're saying it. Express clearly that you DON'T want to do (example: I don't want to make your decision for you) and express what you DO want to do (example: I want to be supportive and be there for you in any way you need)



HOW TO COMMUNICATE



Think first. Act second. Keep an open mind.

Communicate respect and safety - Communicate respect and acknowledge their thoughts and opinions openly. Create an environment that makes them feel comfortable opening up in. Example: saying something like “I’m hearing that smoking weed helps you relax because you’re feeling really overwhelmed with school? is that right?” “I’m sorry that you have been feeling so anxious, do you want to hear about some ways I cope with that? Maybe something could be interesting to you.”

Actively listen - instead of focusing on what you want to say, try your best to actively listen to what they are saying. Be positive and try to ask open-ended questions that are not accusatory. Let them know that you really hear them and offer compassion and understanding.

Enforce boundaries - make it clear that you will not be tolerating drug or alcohol misuse in your household and that there are family rules. Explain that contrary to popular belief, drugs are in fact ILLEGAL by law. Get them to understand that they are endangering themselves and their futures. Most importantly, wholeheartedly express that you are family and that you won’t be giving up on your child because you love them and are there to support and help them, in any way possible.

TIPS FOR HOW TO TALK TO YOUR KIDS



- Be informed about drugs, effects, and use
- Open and honest dialogue
- Reassure your child that you trust them
 - Try not to do anything that would make them think that you don't trust them
- Reassure that your #1 concern is their safety
- Praise them when they do things well to improve their self-esteem
- Don't jump to conclusions

*Drug use can affect any family.
It doesn't mean that you have failed as a parent.*

SOCIAL MEDIA AND MENTAL HEALTH



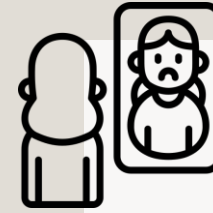
Anxiety
Panic Attacks
Depression



Loneliness
FOMO
Fear of Missing Out



Trauma
PTSD



Obsessive behaviour
Low Self-Esteem



Identity
Sexuality



Body Image
Eating Disorders



Distraction
Escapism

SOCIAL MEDIA AND MENTAL HEALTH

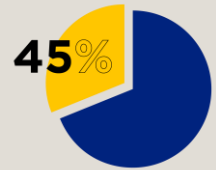
Social media can have a profound effect on mental health, especially among young people whose brains are still developing and are more susceptible to influence. Platforms often promote unrealistic standards and lifestyles—everything is curated, filtered, and facetuned, creating a distorted version of reality. This constant exposure to idealized images and narratives can lead to anxiety, panic attacks, and harmful comparisons.

The pressure to keep up with others—whether through peer influence or the fear of missing out (FOMO)—can push individuals toward risky behaviors. For some, seeing friends and influencers seemingly living perfect lives can trigger feelings of inadequacy or isolation. In extreme cases, this emotional distress may lead to unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as substance use.

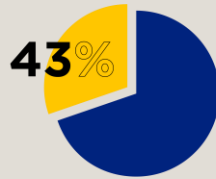
Ironically, while social media is designed to connect people, it can also contribute to feelings of loneliness. Those who choose to disconnect may feel isolated, while those who stay online may struggle with the pressure to maintain a façade.

Ultimately, social media allows users to present a carefully constructed version of their lives, often prioritizing appearance over authenticity. For impressionable minds, this can be dangerous—leading to emotional distress, poor decision-making, and a distorted sense of self-worth.

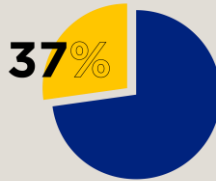
SOCIAL MEDIA AND MENTAL HEALTH



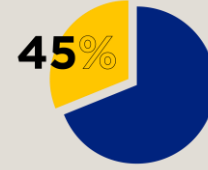
of teens feel overwhelmed by online drama



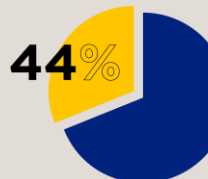
of teens feel pressured to maintain a particular outward appearance online



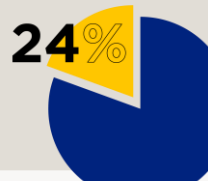
of teens feel pressured to receive virtual "likes"



of teens report being connected through technology almost constantly



of teens are online several times a day



of teens believe that social media is negative

Glamorization of Drugs and Alcohol

Research shows that pop culture and media can have a significantly negative influence on children, teenagers, and young adults. Exposure to certain messages and lifestyles portrayed in media often normalizes risky behaviors, including substance use. Statistics indicate that over half of high school students experiment with illicit drugs, and more than 70% consume alcohol before graduation. Alarmingly, many young people who develop substance use issues begin experimenting as early as age 12 or 13.

This is particularly concerning given that the human brain continues to develop until around age 25. Early exposure to drugs and alcohol can interfere with cognitive development, emotional regulation, and decision-making abilities—potentially leading to long-term consequences.

Understanding the vulnerability of young minds is essential when considering the impact of media and cultural influences on their choices and well-being.



PORTAGE IN CANADA

Atlantic, since 1996

- Youth program

Quebec, since 1973

- Youth programs
- Adult programs
- Mother and Child program
- Mental Health and Addiction program
- Employment Reintegration programs

Ontario, since 1985

- Youth program



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

- Residential drug rehabilitation centre
 - Residential program – 3 to 6 months
 - Aftercare follow-up – 2 years
- For youth (14-21 years of age) suffering from substance use disorder
- Portage Academy
 - We offer a mandatory on-site school program, taught by certified teachers.
- Family-type setting within the therapeutic community
- Structured and safe residential environment

PORTAGE SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Challenges in Education

For many young people, school can be a source of stress. Before arriving at Portage, many residents struggled academically, and some even dropped out.

Our Educational Support

Portage offers on-site school programs in collaboration with local school boards to help students get back on track and succeed in school.



PORTAGE SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Key Program Features:

- ❖ **Small class sizes**
- ❖ **Individualised learning plans**
- ❖ **Dedicated and specialised teachers**

*"At Portage, school helped me rediscover my love for studying." –
Franck, Lac Écho*

*"It re-motivates you to complete missed courses and succeed." –
Jean-Christophe, Elora*

GOAL

⇒ At Portage Academy, students rediscover their academic potential, often reigniting their motivation to complete high school and pursue post-secondary education.

FAMILY SERVICES

- Family support groups available on a virtual platform (Zoom)
- Joint groups with parents and youth throughout treatment and into the Aftercare phase
- Transition planning to create a strong support network
- When reintegrating back into the family, establishing expectations in the home and providing support to both youth and their families

THANK YOU

Contact

1 (844) 939-0202
info@portage.ca

