



Drug Abuse: How You Can Help a Friend

You notice your friend:

- Has begun using drugs
- Has been using more often, in excess, and/or as a way to deal with stress or problems
- Has been unsuccessful in cutting back or quitting
- Has been experiencing repeated negative consequences from drug use
- Has been making excuses for, minimizing, or blaming others for negative outcomes from using

Any of the following *signs* may indicate possible abuse of drugs:

- Abrupt changes in class attendance, study habits, and academic performance
- Appetite and weight changes
- Changes in usual activity level
- Haggard appearance and less attention to hygiene
- Bloodshot eyes
- Mood swings or personality changes that are out of character
- Irritability, nervousness, aggression
- Secretiveness and/or overprotectiveness of personal possessions
- Unusual borrowing of money and/or stealing
- Wearing sunglasses more often, especially at unnecessary times
- Wearing long sleeves more often, especially at unnecessary times
- Withdrawal from regular social group
- Association with others who use regularly
- Increased trips to the bathroom or other private areas
- Dry mouth and nose, and sniffing
- Needle marks
- Increased and excessive daydreaming
- Anger in response to others' suspicion
- Defensive when confronted about problematic behavior related to drug use
- Drug use is a regular and/or significant part of weekly social activities
- USD policy violations and/or legal problems related to drug use
- Continued use despite ongoing relationship problems caused or worsened by use
- Trouble with law enforcement officials because of drug use or related behavior

What you can do:

- Choose a *good time* to let your friend know you care and are concerned without blaming or judging
- It is not a good time to talk when your friend is high or in an altered state
- Use “ I statements” (e.g., “ *I’m* concerned about you and want to make sure you’re OK”, instead of “*you’re* smoking too much”)
- Provide your friends with details about what you’re noticing (e.g., “I’ve noticed you have been tired and have been missing classes”)
- *Listen* to what your friend has to say
- Educate yourself on resources to share with your friend
- Remind your friend of some of the risks, especially those most relevant for him/her
- Do not make excuses for his/her behavior; it would likely “enable” your friend and prevent change from happening
- Clarify your support by defining what you are willing to do to help; create opportunities to participate in social activities that do not include drugs
- Offer suggestions and encourage your friend use resources including Alcohol & Other Drug Services (AODS) in UC 221 (x4618)
- *Call AODS or another resource for guidance if you do not know what to do

Some Drugs Commonly used on College Campuses are:

Marijuana, Cocaine
Ecstasy, LSD, Methamphetamine
Date Rape: GHB, Ketamine, Rohypnol
Rx: Vicadin, Oxycontin, Adderall, Ritalin

Your friend may or may not be ready to acknowledge that his/her behavior is problematic, and is probably exhibiting behaviors reflective of being in a particular “stage of readiness to change”:

Pre-contemplation

Your friend doesn’t acknowledge that a problem exists and, as a result, is not considering changing his/her behavior anytime soon (e.g., your friend says, “I don’t have a problem” or “This isn’t going to hurt me”). However, other close friends may be aware of the problem.

Contemplation

Your friend acknowledges the problem, and is considering changing, but has not made a commitment. Your friend is probably experiencing a significant amount of ambivalence and is weighing the pros and cons of his/her behavior (e.g., “I can’t believe I used that much, but it’s not that big of a deal” or “You might have a point, but I don’t have a problem”). Your friend may be over-estimating the pros or under-estimating the cons.

Action

Your friend is making positive changes and adjustments in his/her activities in order to decrease use of drugs and related destructive behavior (e.g., your friend has called AODS or has been using less.)

Thank you for taking the time to read this.
Your willingness to confront the problematic use of drugs and related behaviors
may be invaluable to a friend in need.