



Stages of Adolescent Substance Abuse

Stage 1: Experimental/Social Use of Drugs or Alcohol Behavioral

Behavioral

- ✓ Uses drugs/alcohol occasionally (weekends, parties)
- ✓ Gets drugs/alcohol from friends; sometimes obtain parent's alcohol
- ✓ Has no major changes in behavior (although they may lie about use, experience moderate hangovers, or adults may find evidence)

Emotional or Mental

- ✓ Uses drugs/alcohol because of curiosity, peer pressure, rebellion, boredom, or as a social lubricant or as a way to experience pleasurable feelings
- ✓ Experiences euphoria/intoxication and then return to a normal state

Stage 2: Purposeful Misuse of Drugs or Alcohol

Behavioral

- ✓ Uses drugs/alcohol on a regular basis (several times a week or during the daytime)
- ✓ Buys enough drugs/alcohol to be prepared for future use
- ✓ Experiences decline in school performance and attendance, mood swings, lying/conning, changes in appearance, increased family conflict, increased rebellion, has straight and drug-using friends

Emotional or Mental

- ✓ Uses drugs/alcohol to cope with stress or uncomfortable feelings; experience pleasure; overcome feelings of inadequacy
- ✓ May begin to feel guilt, fear, shame about their drugs/alcohol use
- ✓ Experiences euphoria/intoxication and then return to a normal state

Stage 3: Habitual Use or Daily Preoccupation with Drugs or Alcohol

Behavioral

- ✓ Engages in almost daily use and may use drugs/alcohol alone
- ✓ Has made unsuccessful efforts to control use
- ✓ May sell drugs to keep personal supply/may steal for money
- ✓ Steals, lies, or cons others to cover use; focused on obtaining and using
- ✓ Has poor school performance/attendance, no straight friends
- ✓ Has drugs/alcohol drug culture appearance, poor family relationships, personality changes

Emotional or Mental

- ✓ Experiences depression or uncomfortable feelings when not taking the drug
- ✓ May have suicidal thoughts/attempts not using drugs

- ✓ Experiences shame and guilt, then uses drugs/alcohol to maintain normal feelings
- ✓ After euphoria, experiences pain, depression, and discomfort

Physical

- ✓ Needs more substance to produce same effect

Stage 4: Dependency or Addiction to Drugs or Alcohol

Behavioral

- ✓ Uses drugs or alcohol daily or on a continuous basis
- ✓ May have run away from home
- ✓ Takes serious risks or engage in criminal behavior to obtain drugs
- ✓ Has had possible overdoses
- ✓ Has quit school or were expelled from school

Emotional or Mental

- ✓ Takes drugs to avoid depression or pain; many want to
- ✓ Is out of control with their drug use escape realities of daily living
- ✓ Experiences guilt, shame, remorse
- ✓ Has suicidal thoughts or attempts
- ✓ Has changes in personality
- ✓ Exhibits changing emotions (depression, irritability, aggression, irritation, apathy)
- ✓ Experiences memory loss, flashbacks, paranoia, volatile mood swings, & other mental problems
- ✓ Takes drugs to feel normal; they are unlikely to experience euphoria
- ✓ Does not care about getting caught; they are focused on getting and using drugs at any cost
- ✓ Focuses all interest on getting and using drugs

Physical

- ✓ Has blackouts
- ✓ Shows signs of physical deterioration (health problems, weight loss)
- ✓ Has poor physical appearance

from: Parent Resource Guide. Alcohol and Drug Services of Gallatin County; Adolescent Resource Center. www.adsgc.org/parentguide.htm

Contact the Adolescent Resource Center: 406-586-5908.