

## Pacific Beach Middle School

### Counseling Center

## **SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DRUG USE**

**It is important to keep in mind** that if a student shows any of the following symptoms, it *does not necessarily* mean that he or she is using drugs. The presence of some of these behaviors could be the product of adolescent stress. Others may be symptoms of depression or a host of other problems. Whatever the cause, they may warrant attention, especially if they persist or if they occur in a cluster. A mental health professional or a caring and concerned adult may help a youngster successfully overcome a crisis and develop more effective coping skills, often preventing further problems.

**The key is change!** It is important to watch for any significant changes in your student's physical appearance, personality, attitude or behavior.

### **Physical Signs**

- Loss of appetite, increase in appetite, any changes in eating habits, unexplained weight loss or gain
- Slowed or staggering walk; poor physical coordination.
- Inability to sleep, awake at unusual times, unusual laziness
- Red, watery eyes; pupils larger or smaller than usual; blank stare (look for eye drop bottles, which he/she may be using to mask red eyes)
- Cold, sweaty palms; shaking hands
- Puffy face, blushing or paleness
- Smell of substance on breath, body or clothes (look for mouthwash, gum, mints etc., which he/she may be using to mask strong breath)
- Extreme hyperactivity; excessive talkativeness
- Runny nose; hacking cough
- Needle marks on lower arm, leg or bottom of feet.
- Nausea, vomiting or excessive sweating
- Tremors or shakes of hands, feet or head
- Irregular heartbeat

### **Behavioral Signs**

- Change in overall attitude/personality with no other identifiable cause
- Changes in friends; new hang-outs; sudden avoidance of old crowd; doesn't want to talk about new friends; friends are known drug users
- Change in activities or hobbies
- Drop in grades at school or performance at work; skips school or is late for school
- Change in habits at home; loss of interest in family and family activities

- Difficulty in paying attention; forgetfulness
- General lack of motivation, energy, self-esteem, "I don't care" attitude
- Sudden oversensitivity, temper tantrums, or resentful behavior
- Moodiness, irritability, or nervousness
- Silliness or giddiness
- Paranoia
- Excessive need for privacy; unreachable
- Secretive or suspicious behavior
- Car accidents
- Chronic dishonesty
- Unexplained need for money, stealing money or items
- Change in personal grooming habits
- Possession of drug paraphernalia

### **Drug Specific Symptoms:**

**Marijuana:** Glassy, red eyes; loud talking and inappropriate laughter followed by sleepiness; a sweet burnt scent; loss of interest, motivation; weight gain or loss.

**Alcohol:** Clumsiness; difficulty walking; slurred speech; sleepiness; poor judgment; dilated pupils; possession of a false ID card.

**Inhalants:** (Glues, aerosols, and vapors ) Watery eyes; impaired vision, memory and thought; secretions from the nose or rashes around the nose and mouth; headaches and nausea; appearance of intoxication; drowsiness; poor muscle control; changes in appetite; anxiety; irritability; an unusual number of spray cans in the trash.

**Tobacco/Nicotine:** Smell of tobacco; stained fingers or teeth.

### **WHY DO KIDS USE DRUGS?**

Kids have described the following reasons as the precursor to drug use:

- **They want to fit in and be part of the group**
- **To rebel against adult authority**
- **To escape their problems**
- **To hide their feelings of inadequacy or low self-esteem**
- **The thrill and excitement of taking a risk**
- **Wanting to feel all grown up**

### **THE GATEWAY TO DRUGS**

Most teens don't begin with hard drugs like cocaine, crystal meth, or heroin. Most usage begins with drugs that are easily accessible in the adult population and are legal like nicotine

and alcohol. Frequently, this begins with easy access in their home or homes of a friend or family member. Tobacco and alcohol are blamed by many experts to be the gateway or path to more serious drug abuse. Teens recognize the general health hazards of drug use, yet often their willingness to take that risk overcomes their knowledge. After demonstrating they are risk takers, the natural next step is marijuana. From there it becomes a deadly downward spiral toward other drugs and the destructive behaviors that accompany them.

## **RESOURCES AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

National Institute on Drug Abuse

[www.nida.nih.gov](http://www.nida.nih.gov)

American Council for Drug Education

[www.acde.org](http://www.acde.org)

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information

[www.health.org](http://www.health.org)

Drug Facts

[www.freevibe.com](http://www.freevibe.com)

Drug and Alcohol Resource Center

[www.drugandalcoholrehab.net](http://www.drugandalcoholrehab.net)

*\*\*Please do not hesitate to contact the Counseling Center with any suspicions, concerns, and/or questions. We are here to offer all P.B.M.S. students the support they need to be successful and healthy.*