



What Parents Need to Know About Methamphetamine

As parents we face the incredible challenge of keeping our children safe in an increasingly dangerous world. Our teenagers are tempted by their peers and by influential adults to engage in all types of risky behavior including promiscuous sex and illegal drugs. In fact they are mocked and derided if they *do not* dress provocatively, commit 'minor crimes' and participate in under aged drinking, dope and sex. The pressure on our children is enormous and pervasive.

Every teenager is vulnerable to methamphetamine addiction because it is so widely available. Highly driven and competitive teens often think they can use it 'temporarily' to study all night for finals or finish a big project. Since they are taking it by mouth, they think it is not addictive. Low dose addicts are still addicts. They need it every day to 'be productive' and they feel tired and depressed when they don't take it.

Psychologically disturbed teenagers are drawn to methamphetamine as a 'remedy' for their social anxiety or depression. They can overcome their feelings of inadequacy or rejection by using a drug that makes them feel powerful, competent and energetic. Teens with bipolar disorder (manic depression) are vulnerable because they can use meth to keep themselves manic and avoid the depressed mood associated with bipolar.

But the more common profile of the meth using teenager is a normal kid who wants to fit in with the crowd, sound cool and impress the girls (or boys). He gets drunk and tries it once, and finds that the high is just too great to pass up. In the early stages of addiction, the 'crash' afterwards is just a mild depression, not as bad as a hangover from drinking. But as he continues to use, the crash gets worse and the downward spiral is fast and steep.

Signs of addiction

The early signs of methamphetamine use are all personality changes. Mood swings, impatience, irritability and withdrawal from the family are all signs of a problem. Your formerly happy teenager who used to shoot baskets with you after school is suddenly sullen. He won't look you in the eye. He's always wearing sunglasses, even indoors. His attitude has changed. Under aged drinking and marijuana use are risk factors and signs that a child is hanging around with the wrong people.

Late signs of meth use are memory loss and hallucinations, sleeping all day and missing school or work, and aggressive behavior toward family members, especially parents. You may notice things missing, money or things that can be pawned. He may get caught shoplifting or stealing from the neighbor's garage. By the time these symptoms develop, the addiction is well established and requires professional help.

Take action

Methamphetamine causes significant brain damage, even with casual use. If parents suspect a teenager is using, the first step is to talk to that teenager. Point out the reasons for your suspicion, show him what you found in his room, and if he still denies it – which is likely – give him a drug test. A hair sample is the most reliable test you can get; vendors for it are listed in the links section of this website. You don't have to pull the hair out, just clip it at the hairline, a small lock of hair about like a pencil lead. It can be tested for all drugs except marijuana.

If the child is under 18 you do have authority to order counseling or even inpatient treatment for your child in most states. He will fuss and complain, he may threaten to run away. Your responsibility as a parent is to be aggressive about this drug which causes irreversible brain damage.

The adolescent brain is still developing up to the age of 21. The teenager's judgment, impulse control and reasoning are not mature until then. Drugs of abuse impair the maturation of the brain and prevent normal psychological development. If a child starts using drugs at age 14, he will continue to act like a 14 year old, even as an adult. Intervention is essential for the young teen who is using drugs.

If the addict is over 18, your options are much more limited. You cannot have him confined to treatment against his will unless legal authorities are involved. Many parents resort to having their child arrested for this reason. An adult arrest record is not nearly as destructive to his future as an untreated methamphetamine addiction.

Tough Love

Parenting a teenager in today's society requires almost as much time and attention as parenting a two year old. Adolescence involves almost as much brain development as the preschool years. We are teaching our kids how to control themselves and their emotions during this turbulent period. We have to set limits for them until they learn how to set limits for themselves. As they demonstrate maturity we can back off, but be ready to step in again if they cross our clearly defined limits on what is acceptable behavior.

Irritability, aggressive behavior and cutting school are not normal teenage behavior. The function of adolescence is to learn to control your emotions, and expressions of aggression are not normal, they are immature, and should be treated like a two year old's temper tantrum.

A written contract is helpful in dealing with a rebellious teen. Clear consequences for misbehavior are spelled out in advance and enforced without anger or emotion. A child who comes home drunk knows he will be punished severely, by the loss of privileges, the use of his car, or by having him arrested for public intoxication if there are repeat offences. This punishment is not out of anger, but out of love.

Cutting school should not be tolerated by any parent. We all know that if we miss work we will get fired. Our kids have to be held to the same standard. If a teenager is acting like a baby and skipping school, he needs to be treated like a baby, walked to school by his mommy and led to his teacher like a little boy. You will only have to do this once. It will never happen again.

Signs of a problem

Physical changes

- Blood shot eyes
- Dilated pupils
- Weight loss
- Sudden increase in acne

Change in attitude

- Irritability, wild mood swings
- Fidgety and restless
- Distant look, no conversation
- Loss of interest in former hobbies
- Loss of appetite
- Won't let you in his room
- Doesn't keep clean

Changes in behavior

- Thrashes in his sleep
- Wears sunglasses a lot
- Repetitive motions, drumming fingers
- Twitches and grunts
- Forgets important events
- Stealing and lying
- Talking too much, too fast, too loud

Change in friends

- Late hours
- Lots of phone calls
- New friends you don't know
- Not home when you call from work

Drop in grades

- Calls from teachers, coaches
- Drops out of sports teams
- Loss of interest in school projects
- Last minute scrambles for assignments
- Can't get up for school

This list is not comprehensive and does not describe every addict.

A child's room should be inspected by a parent on a regular basis. This is not being nosy; this is being a responsible parent. The child's room is not his room. It is your room, and he keeps his stuff in it. You have a right and an obligation to go through your teenager's room looking for things that could harm your child.

Physical evidence of a drug problem

- Joint butts, rolling papers
- Small Alligator clip [roach clip]

- Baggies and twist ties
- Little bits of tin foil wadded up, folded, twisted into tubes
- Pills, old pill bottles, candy containers
- Charred glass pipes with wire mesh in one end
- A hollowed out pen
- Candles, lighters, butane torches
- Razor blades
- Q-tips, pipe cleaners, small wire brush
- Scales
- Broken bits of light bulb
- Large amounts of peroxide
- Syringes, needles
- Elastic tourniquet or waist band from his underwear
- Pipes, bongs
- Charcoal looking residue on his towels
- Crushed soda cans with slits in the depression
- Large amounts of cash
- Pornography
- Pacifiers, glow sticks
- Products designed to beat the drug test
- Lots of air-freshener, room deodorant, or Lysol

The best defense is a good offence. Don't wait until the brain damage is obvious before you do something about your at risk child. You can't go by stereotypes to know whether your child is at risk for drug abuse. Methamphetamine addiction strikes in the wealthiest neighborhoods in this nation just like in the poorest trailer parks. Bright, healthy, happy kids can get addicted. Educated professionals can get addicted. There is no vaccine against drug abuse.