

# SIGNS TO WATCH FOR

## It's hard to recognize early signs of teen drinking

Most parents are overconfident in believing they would know if their child were drinking. Unfortunately, all of Wyoming's teens are at risk for use and abuse of alcohol. As a parent, it is important to be aware of this risk and to continuously

It is likely that there will be **NO** visible signs of early experimentation.

monitor your teen. However, identifying signs of early alcohol use in children can be difficult even with careful monitoring.

One sign that your child is experimenting, or considering doing so, could be a casual mention that one or more

of your teen's friends is drinking. Or, your child may say that one of their friend's parents lets their teen drink. These could be "trial balloons" to test your reaction to underage drinking. Other early signs of experimentation might include laughing or joking about friends' alcohol use, alcohol advertisements, or other alcohol-related scenes in TV shows or movies. Your teen may acquire alcohol-related promotional items such as T-shirts, mugs, stickers, etc. It is also likely that there will be no visible signs of early experimentation.

By the time a parent recognizes physical and personality changes, the teen is already engaging in heavy alcohol use and could be developing serious abuse problems. Familiarize yourself with common warning signs of alcohol abuse, but please keep in mind that because these signs often don't become visible until the teen has been drinking for quite awhile. The most effective approach in reducing teen alcohol usage is through ongoing monitoring. By monitoring, you can find out if your teen is using alcohol before these signs become visible and serious abuse problems may already exist.

If you have a concern or think there may be a problem, share your concern with your child. Believe in your power to help your child, but don't be afraid to seek help if you feel overwhelmed, or uncertain, or simply want additional information. If you believe that your child may be having trouble, please contact your child's physician or your local Peak Wellness Center office for assessment.

The "Wyoming Resources" section on page 10 of this Parent Handbook provides contact information you may find helpful.

## SIGNS that may indicate a problem with substance abuse\*

Some of the signs of alcohol abuse below may also be "normal" adolescent behavior. What is not "normal,"

however, is if more than a few of the following signs listed below are present. Such a combination of changes could indicate a serious problem.<sup>3</sup>

### Personality or Behavior Changes

- Abrupt changes in mood or attitude
- More irritable or argumentative
- Sudden decline in attendance or performance at school
- Rebellious against family rules
- Sudden resistance to discipline at school
- Uncharacteristic withdrawal from family or friends
- "Nothing matters" attitude; losing interest in school, sports, or other activities that used to be important
- Physical, emotional, or mental problems
- Memory lapses
- Poor concentration
- Needs more money—or money missing
- Heightened secrecy about actions or possessions
- Switching friends
- Associating with a new group of friends whom your child refuses to discuss
- Finding alcohol in your child's room or belongings

### Physical Changes

- Less appetite or continually hungry
- Loss or gain of weight
- Less interested in appearance
- Circles under eyes and pale skin, including face
- Bloodshot eyes
- Slurred or rapid speech
- Smell of alcohol on breath, or sudden, frequent use of breath mints

\*Please note that these could also be signs of drug use, depression, suicidal ideation or other mental health issues.

<sup>3</sup> Excerpts on this page adapted from "Make a Difference" National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "Keeping Your Kids Drug-Free" by the National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign, Office of National Drug Control Policy, and the "National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse VI: Teens" February 2001 conducted by QEV Analytics and funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.