

for addiction  
workshops.

## Signs of Drug Abuse

Information Provided by NarcAnon San Diego

<http://www.drugaddictiontreatment.info/signs-of-drug-abuse.htm>

Signs of drug abuse can be obvious to those who know what to look for. Although, for those who are clueless as to what to look for when an individual is abusing drugs here are some key points to be aware of. The signs of drug abuse vary depending on the drug that is being used. Those who are close to the individual who is abusing drugs or alcohol need to be aware of the signs of drug abuse. Acknowledging that there is a problem is extremely important because living in denial can be fatal. Knowing these signs of drug abuse could help to save the life of someone that is close to you.

There are two areas that are distinct signs of drug abuse: Physical Appearance and General Mannerisms. Remember this may not apply to everyone but are tell-tale signs that there could be a drug abuse problem. At first you may not see any physical signs of drug use. Alcohol use is relatively easy to detect because of its odor. Marijuana smell is generally covered up by smoking cigarettes, or other things such as incense, room deodorizers, etc.

### Generalized Signs of Drug Abuse Include But Are Not Limited To:

- Abrupt changes in work or school attendance, quality of work, work output, grades, discipline.
- Unusual flare-ups or outbreaks of temper.
- Withdrawal from responsibility.
- General changes in overall attitude.
- Deterioration of physical appearance and grooming.
- Wearing of sunglasses at inappropriate times.
- Continual wearing of long-sleeved garments particularly in hot weather or reluctance to wear short sleeved attire when appropriate.
- Association with known substance abusers.
- Unusual borrowing of money from friends, co-workers or parents.
- Stealing small items from employer, home or school.
- Secretive behavior regarding actions and possessions; poorly concealed attempts to avoid attention and suspicion such as frequent trips to storage rooms, restroom, basement, etc.
- The Person generally looks "tired."
- Darkening of skin below the eyes.
- Skin wrinkling around the eyes prematurely.
- Eyes are dull.
- Skin tone is pale or grayish.
- The walk and body motions are sort of aimless (not definite and direct).
- The person cannot comfortably look you in the eye when speaking, being spoken to or approached.

- If the person is injecting cocaine or stimulants you will probably be able to see fresh needle marks. He might try to hide these by wearing long-sleeved shirts, even in hot weather.
- Use or possession of paraphernalia including small spoons, razor blades, mirror, little bottles of white powder and plastic, glass or metal straws.

## **Marijuana**

- People on marijuana, pot, hash or hash oil will have irritated eyes.
- They may be bloodshot or appear to have a dazed or expressionless appearance and will also experience dry lips and "cotton mouth."
- They can walk around in a daze or euphoric stupor staring out into space or at nothing and may go into fits of laughter or laugh when there is nothing to laugh about.
- Marijuana has a strong, pungent, virtually unmistakable odor. It's long lasting and difficult to mask. This is a telltale sign that a person has either smoked marijuana or it has been smoked in his or her presence.
- The person may attempt to eliminate this sign by putting clothes in the wash immediately upon coming home or taking a quick shower before being around other people.
- Sleepy or stuporous in the later stages.
- Forgetfulness in conversation.
- Tendency to drive slowly - below speed limit.
- Distorted sense of time passage - tendency to overestimate time intervals.
- Use or possession of paraphernalia including roach clip, packs of rolling papers, pipes or bongs.

## **LSD & Hallucinogens**

- A person who has take LSD or other psychedelics will manifest glassy eyes and have a blank, vacant stare.
- Often he appears to be daydreaming and needs to be spoken to several times before responding.
- He will be found to have inappropriate and extended interest in common objects.
- For example, examining an ashtray or a drawing for a long time, turning it, viewing it from different angles.
- The person may also have a similar interest in body parts, such as a finger, hand or food. Conversation tends to be esoteric, like a "head trip."
- He will hallucinate.
- He will experience anxiety for no apparent reason.
- PCP users may experience sweating episodes, salivate heavily and have flushed skin.
- They may have dilated pupils and may be inexplicably high-strung.

## **Depressants**

- The person is not dependable, is late to school/work and it keeps getting worse.
- Short attention span, doesn't listen well.

### Opiates

- A person on an opiate such as heroin or morphine will have constricted pupils that will look like pinpoints or small dots.
- Someone on opiates usually itches and you can see the person lightly and frequently scratching himself.
- If the method of ingestion is sniffing, his nostrils may appear raw and red.
- If the method of ingestion is by injection there will be needle marks in arms, behind the knees or ankles.
- Heroin users have been known to inject themselves under the tongue, or directly into open sores. These locations are not as easy to detect.
- They may get very pale and sweaty or extremely thirsty.
- Opiates affect people in different ways: some may get very "hyper"(active or frantic) and run around working or looking busy while others get very lethargic (nodding or doping off).
- The person may go around asking others for money. This will not be small change for cigarettes, but more like \$20 or \$40 here or there.
- Use or possession of paraphernalia, including syringes, bent spoons, bottle caps, eye droppers, rubber tubing, cotton and needles.
- Slurred speech.

### Cocaine, Crack & Amphetamines

- A person on cocaine or speed will usually have glassy eyes and very, very large pupils. He may try to hide this condition by constantly wearing sunglasses or other dark glasses.
- His behavior will be erratic. He cannot relax or confront and is restless.
- One will observe uncharacteristic activity, irritability, nervousness or aggression. Remember, stimulants speed up the body's functions and the person may have trouble sitting still, remaining inactive or controlling his or her temper. For this reason, there may be long periods without sleeping. The body, quickened by the chemicals avoids sleep for extended sleep for extended periods of time. The person may exhibit this tendency of insomnia and then "crash" and sleep for similarly long period of time.
- The person will tend to move fast and ramble or be non sequitur in his conversation-jumping from one topic to another.
- He or she will also experience "cotton mouth" and may drink inordinate amounts of water to satiate thirst and constantly be licking his lips.
- He may constantly be sniffing despite the lack of a cold or allergies.
- The person might exhibit unexplainable changes in appetite or weight. Stimulants diminish the user's appetite (which is why they are found in diet pills.) One might see a sudden lack of interest in food.

- A person under the influence of depressants such as barbiturates or Valium may act intoxicated (slurred speech, stumbling gait, droopy eyes, etc).
- Depressants slow down the body's functions, which may prompt unwarranted sleep episodes.
- There will be pronounced tendency to fall asleep in unusual situation such as at dinner and the person will show signs of overall listlessness.

### Alcohol

- Alcohol can be detected on the breath. A user may attempt to mask it with extraordinary use of mints, mouthwash or even garlic.
- Speech will be slurred. Watch for drawn-out speech and rambling, sometimes illogical talk.
- Symptomatic of alcohol abuse are headaches and nausea.
- Watch for telltale signs of hangover, disinterest in breakfast, late sleeping and an overall grouchiness throughout the day.
- In all instances of substance abuse, watch for a tendency on the part of the abuser to refrain and shun conversation and face-to-face meetings with others.
- You are watching for behavior that represents a somewhat dramatic change in character from previous experience.
- Loss of memory (blackouts).
- Difficulty focusing; glazed appearance of the eyes.
- Unexplained bruises and accidents.
- Flushed skin.