



Substance Abuse Prevention

Substance abuse and problematic patterns of substance use among youth can lead to problems at school, cause or aggravate physical and mental health-related issues, promote poor peer relationships, cause motor-vehicle accidents, and place stress on the family. They can also develop into lifelong issues such as substance dependence, chronic health problems, and social and financial consequences.¹

Substance abuse is the harmful pattern of using substances—such as tobacco, alcohol, illicit drugs, and prescription drugs—leading to impairment or distress with one or more of the following behaviors:

- Recurrent substance use resulting in failure to fulfill major responsibilities at work, school, or home such as repeated absences, suspension, and expulsion
- Recurrent substance use in situations where it is physically dangerous, such as driving while impaired
- Recurrent substance-related legal problems, such as arrests for disorderly conduct that are substance-related
- Continued substance use despite having persistent or recurring social or personal problems caused or worsened by substance use²

One of the most highly abused substances among youth in the U.S. is alcohol.³ Youth engage in binge drinking, a pattern of drinking that elevates the blood alcohol concentration to 0.08 percent or above, more than adults do.⁴ This can lead to risky and potentially harmful behaviors, and

many times substance abuse (60-75 percent of youth with substance abuse problems) co-occurs with mental health disorders.

Substance use, abuse, and dependence can negatively impact every aspect of an individual's life. Child-serving systems need to intervene early in the lives of youth to prevent or treat abuse, support young people, and provide them with the tools to choose the right path.

¹ Department of Justice, 1998

² American Psychiatric Association, 2000

³ Johnston, O'Malley, Bachman, & Schulenberg, 2012

⁴ For the typical adult, this pattern corresponds to consuming five or more drinks [men], or four or more drinks [women], in about 2 hours.

Source: <http://youth.gov/youth-topics/substance-abuse>