



# **BATTLING SUBSTANCE ABUSE FOR EVERYONE**

— *A Guide for Parents and Teachers* —

# BSAFE: BATTLING SUBSTANCE ABUSE FOR EVERYONE

Parents and teachers are strong allies in the fight to protect our children, and are in the best position to utilize the most powerful weapon in the battle—awareness. It can be difficult to decide what to do if you suspect that your child or student has a problem with drugs or alcohol. The goal of this pamphlet is to arm you with some basic tools for identifying, verifying, and then addressing substance abuse problems in children. It is important to keep in mind, however, that every situation presents a unique set of circumstances and ultimately requires a unique, customized intervention plan. The advice below is simply a starting point. For more information on this subject, including tips from experts trained in the field, visit [www.tyla.org](http://www.tyla.org).

## WARNING SIGNS AND INDICATORS

Warning signs that a child is abusing drugs or alcohol are not always apparent. Teachers and parents should talk to each other if they see signs of drug or alcohol abuse to corroborate their suspicion. Here are some red flags to look for:

### BEHAVIORAL INDICATORS:

- Sudden and significant changes in energy levels
- Decreased interaction with parents or teachers
- A change in the child's circle of friends
- Mood changes and emotional instability, including exhibition of unusual stress
- Uncharacteristic/unexplained isolation from extra-curricular activities
- Uncharacteristic failure to adhere to home or classroom rules
- Drastic drop in performance at school/work
- Resistance to discussions concerning substance abuse

### PHYSICAL INDICATORS:

- Red, glassy, dry eyes, or avoidance of eye contact
- Flushed cheeks
- Lack of care for appearance; inattention to personal hygiene
- Loss of appetite/sudden weight loss or voracious appetite/sudden weight gain
- Excessive thirst or signs of dehydration such as cracked lips
- Rapid decline in dental health or sudden habit of clenching or grinding teeth
- Heavy use of perfumes, mouth fresheners, or air fresheners (to disguise odors)
- Additional unexplained requests for money

- Realization that money or items of value are missing
- Disappearance of cold medicine, pain medicine, or prescription medicine
- Issues with coordination and balance
- Unexplained and frequent bruises, sores, or puncture marks
- Reckless driving, car accidents and damage to a vehicle driven by the child
- Extraordinary or lavish purchases the child cannot afford (sign of drug dealing)
- Numerous brief visits from friends or meetings in the driveway (sign of drug dealing)
- Unusual amount of text messages and short phone calls followed by the child's disappearance

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU SUSPECT DRUG OR ALCOHOL ABUSE

### *Step One: Investigate and Trust Your Instincts*

#### **Remember: It's okay to snoop.**

Parents should not feel uncomfortable about using aggressive surveillance techniques to uncover evidence of drug or alcohol use. Parents have both a right and responsibility to figure out what is going on with their children, even if that means going through a child's room or other personal belongings. Search the obvious places, but also recognize that less obvious places, such as desktop computers, speakers, and other large electronics are popular places to hide drugs because they have removable components and compartments. Children who drive often hide drugs in their cars, believing they safely concealed them if they have the only key. Parents can also buy urine drug-screen cups and breathalyzers to determine if the child is using substances. Confirmation of drug or alcohol use through hard evidence will let you know that you should take the next step.

Teachers who suspect a student of using substances should immediately consult school or school-district policies and procedures before taking action.

### *Step Two: Involve Others*

#### **Remember: There is no benefit to hiding the issue from others; children need many allies to combat substance abuse.**

Parents should consider sharing suspicions with other members of the household, family members, and even the parents of the child's close friends. The help of a neutral third party with substance abuse experience is invaluable. Parents should seek the assistance of a trained addiction or other healthcare professionals to discuss strategies

for dealing with addiction at home, especially if the child is facing disciplinary action in school or legal consequences.

Parents can raise the issue of potential or confirmed substance use/abuse at their child's school, but only after recognizing that this may result in significant repercussions for their child. However, working in partnership with school administrators can provide data and insight into the magnitude of the problem, if the child, in fact, does have a substance abuse problem.

If permitted by the school/school district's policies and procedures, teachers should notify parents about their suspicions after informing supervisors.

### *Step Three: Confront the child*

**Remember: You are unlikely to get an admission.**

Be prepared for the child to deny use, blame others for drug or alcohol odors, provide explanations for your suspicions, and even become angry and upset with you in an attempt to get you to back down. If you are nervous about the confrontation, attempt a role-play of the discussion prior to engaging the child.

You should remind the child that there are dire consequences for substance abuse and that they will be responsible for facing those consequences. Consider implementing rules quickly, but be prepared to enforce those rules consistently and persistently. You should also provide incentives for success. During the discussion, you should try to determine whether the use is infrequent or is truly an addiction. While there should be a no-tolerance policy for alcohol and drug use, experts suggest you should differentiate between one-time or infrequent use, on the one hand, and addiction, on the other, to determine the best plan for treatment. It is important to keep an open dialogue so the child feels comfortable discussing substance abuse with you.

If the child is unwilling to engage in an open discussion, you should consider the possibility of involving a third-party interventionist.

### *Step Four: Plan for addiction treatment*

**Remember: You might not want to try this at home.**

Parents who have identified an addiction issue, as opposed to one-time or infrequent use, should not attempt a treatment-through-parenting approach to this problem.

Alcohol and drug addiction is a chronic brain disease that affects not only the child, but the parents and the rest of the family. Parents should talk to all members of the household about the addiction, its consequences, and a plan for treatment.

The latest research provided by the National Institute of Health recommends comprehensive treatment of substance abuse. The first step is having a trained addiction psychiatrist conduct an assessment of the child. From there, the appropriate level of treatment can be determined, including treatment of psychiatric issues and the use of anti-addiction medications, if necessary. Medical issues, wellness, and nutrition should be addressed in the treatment plan. Parents should check with insurance providers to determine coverage for treatment programs. Additionally, the child should be provided with a choice of sober, peer-based support systems such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Smart Recovery, faith-based programs, or other support groups focused on addiction recovery. This type of treatment can be lifesaving.

If a child is particularly resistant to your efforts to confront drug abuse where there is evidence of an addiction, the child may require a higher level of care. This can include a behavior modification program, which establishes well-defined consequences for inappropriate behavior and incentives for appropriate behavior, or inpatient or outpatient addiction treatment programs with intensive individual or group therapy components. In extreme cases, it may be necessary to have the child arrested or force them to live elsewhere.

### *Step Five: Follow-through and avoid enabling behavior*

**Remember: Allow your child to suffer the consequences of substance abuse.**

Engaging in enabling behavior or denying a child's drug or alcohol use due to disbelief is dangerous, even if it originates from love or the desire to protect the child from the difficult consequences of alcohol or drug abuse. Parental enabling occurs when a parent (1) gives a child money knowing that the child might use it to purchase drugs or alcohol, (2) excuses or blames others for the child's choice to use/abuse drugs or alcohol, (3) allows the child to miss school and/or work due to drug use, or (4) fails to hold the child to his or her responsibilities.

Parents who discover and confirm drug use will experience many emotions, including shock, disappointment, depression, and anger. While natural, it is irrational to blame yourself, a spouse, or any other person for your child's choice to abuse drugs or alcohol. Parents should consider professional guidance for themselves if their feelings remain unresolved.

# LIFE-SAVING LINKS

The Texas Young Lawyers Association's BSAFE Website:  
[www.TYLA.org](http://www.TYLA.org)

U.S. Department of Education Tips for Parents on Keeping Children Drug Free  
<http://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/involve/drugfree/index.html>

The Partnership for a Drugfree America  
The Parent Toolkit: <http://theparenttoolkit.org/>

The National Institute on Drug Abuse Parent Website  
<http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/term/48/Parents>

The ToughLOVE® Parenting Community  
<http://www.toughlove.com/>

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)  
<http://samhsa.gov/>

SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices  
<http://nrepp.samhsa.gov/>

Alcoholics Anonymous  
[www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)

Al-Anon  
[www.al-anon.alateen.org](http://www.al-anon.alateen.org)

Narcotics Anonymous  
[www.na.org](http://www.na.org)

One Choice Can Destroy Substance Abuse Prevention Program and Resources  
[www.onechoicecandestroy.com](http://www.onechoicecandestroy.com)

**The Addiction Hotline: (855) YES-REHAB / (855) 937-7342**



BE AN UNCOMMON LEADER.®

Prepared as a Public Service by the Texas Young  
Lawyers Association and Distributed by the  
State Bar of Texas

For Additional Copies Please Contact:  
Public Information Department  
State Bar of Texas  
P.O. Box 12487  
Austin, Texas 78711-2487  
(800) 204-2222, Ext. 1800  
[tyla.org](http://tyla.org)