



# Middlesex

Dear Middlesex Parents and Guardians,

Teen substance use and abuse can have a major impact on your child's life. Because the teenage brain is still growing, developing and laying down novel neural pathways it is important to have conversations with your child about the importance of avoiding substances that might impair optimal brain functioning.

Teenagers use and/or abuse substances including alcohol, marijuana, nicotine, opioids, stimulants, benzodiazepines, and others for many reasons. Developmentally, the teen brain is hardwired for seeking novelty and risk-taking, in addition to a teenager's increasing need for independence with decision-making. Teenagers also have a greater need for peer acceptance and approval. Adolescents struggling with mental health concerns are at greater risk for abusing substances as well as worsening their mental health condition.

Despite your teenagers apparent disregard of your advice, studies show that discussing your values and feelings around substances does reduce the risk of a future substance use disorder. It is best to pick the time and place for this conversation when stress is low and there is minimal conflict.

To talk to your teen about drugs:

- **Ask your teen's views.** Avoid lectures. Instead, listen to your teen's opinions and questions about drugs. Parents can assure teens that they can be honest and have a discussion without getting in trouble.
- **Discuss reasons not to use drugs.** Avoid scare tactics. Emphasize how drug use can affect the things that are important to your teen. Some examples might be sports performance, driving, health or appearance.
- **Consider media messages.** Social media, television programs, movies and songs can make drug use seem normal or glamorous. Talk about what your teen sees and hears.
- **Discuss ways to resist peer pressure.** Brainstorm with your teen about how to turn down offers of drugs.
- **Be ready to discuss your own drug use.** Think about how you'll respond if your teen asks about your own drug use, including alcohol. If you chose not to use drugs, explain why. If you did use drugs, share what the experience taught you.

For more information about teen substance use and abuse, here are some resources:

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/substance-use/index.htm>

<https://childmind.org/article/mental-health-disorders-and-substance-use/>

<https://www.massgeneral.org/children/substance-use-disorders/substance-use-and-teens>

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/teen/substance-abuse/Pages/Edible-Marijuana-Dangers.aspx>

Sincerely,

Meg McLaughlin

Director of Health and Wellness