

## The "Gateway" Drugs, article on Teen Drug Abuse.

Most adolescents do not begin with the so-called hard drugs such as cocaine, crystal meth or heroin. Usage generally begins with drugs that are much more easily accessible and, in the adult population, are legal; nicotine and alcohol. Usage frequently begins with easy access to these in the home, be it the home of their family, friend or relative. Tobacco and alcohol are believed, by many experts,

to be the "gateway" or entrance to a path towards drug abuse.

Generally, even teens recognize the serious health risks associated with smoking. Yet, if they are willing to smoke, it's an easy link to drinking alcohol. By this time, they have demonstrated they are risk-takers so the obvious next level is to marijuana. From there it can be a dangerous, even deadly spiral towards other drugs, and the destructive behaviors that go along with them.

**Understanding Addictive Behavior** No matter what drug is involved, the disease of addiction appears to follow a predictable course. Typically, the user begins out of some level of curiosity. If the initial experience produces pleasurable results, the individual will more than likely move on to recreational use, such as with friends, at parties or on the weekends. As they come to enjoy the drug more and more, it is inevitable that the usage will increase, such as using during the week on a regular basis. Soon, their lives become more and more centered around getting the drug and finding opportunities to use it. It begins to interfere with relationships, school, work, and other formerly productive areas of interest in their lives. {quotes align=right}By now the drug-dependency, the addiction, has taken control, and the individual is unable to function without the drug.{/quotes} If there is not a physical addiction, there is most certainly a psychological dependency upon their drug of choice. And if their drug of choice is not easily accessible, they will resort to whatever it takes to obtain that drug.

**Marijuana - what you need to know** The National Institute on Drug Abuse reports that marijuana is the illegal drug most often used in this country. Studies show nearly 50% of teenagers try marijuana before they graduate high school. Many parents of teens experimented with Marijuana in their college days, and now find it difficult to talk to their kids about the use of marijuana. But today, marijuana use begins at a much younger age and there is a much more potent form of marijuana available to the kids today.

Kids site their use of marijuana as a way for them to cope with life's problems, to deal with anxiety, anger or depression, a way to escape, something to do so as to ease boredom. Long-term studies of high school students appear to demonstrate a pattern that few young people use other drugs without first having tried marijuana. Of itself then, marijuana is a gateway drug.

**Intervention** The goal of this article has been to provide an overview of teen drug abuse and to make you keenly aware of the warning signs. Again, if the warning signs indicate that intervention is necessary, Teen Help can direct you to a number of effective resources available. Call us at 1-800-637-0701 or Visit our Residential Treatment Section found [HERE](#).