EVEN IF YOU KNOW ABOUT DRINKING OR DRUGS

Simple Questions. Straight Answers.
WHY AM I BEING ASKED ABOUT ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS?

Asking these questions is part of good health care, just like asking about smoking or exercise. Your honest answers can help you get the best care.
Alcohol and drugs can affect parts of your brain that control memory, learning, making decisions, and keeping your feelings and desires under control.

Alcohol can damage all of the organs in your body.

Alcohol Poisoning: Drinking too much at one time slows down your heart rate and breathing. That could kill you.

You may need more and more alcohol or drugs to feel high or just okay. This may lead to dependence and, eventually, addiction.

You probably already know that it's against the law to drink alcohol until you’re 21. You can face penalties if you possess, sell, or buy marijuana for non-medical use in Massachusetts. There are penalties for buying or selling other drugs as well, including prescription drugs.

Sharing prescription drugs or taking more than prescribed to you can cause serious health problems and could lead to an overdose. An overdose happens when the drug slows your breathing down so much that you may become unconscious or even die.
The teenage brain is still developing until around age 25. Alcohol and many drugs can damage brain cells. Damaged brain cells could mean:

- You find it hard to make decisions
- You have trouble controlling your anger
- Have trouble paying attention
- Have trouble organizing your thoughts and actions

These problems could lead to trouble with relationships, school, or work, and difficulty getting the job you want or having the life you want.

**CAN DRINKING OR GETTING HIGH REALLY HURT ME?**

- Young drivers (ages 16-20) are 17 times more likely to die in a crash when they have a blood alcohol concentration of 0.08% (or higher) than when they have not been drinking.
- Teens who drink or use other drugs are more likely to have unsafe sex, which could lead to pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, hepatitis C, or other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- Alcohol and drugs are connected with the leading causes of death among teenagers — accidental injury, homicide, and suicide.
- Using alcohol, illegal drugs, or using someone else's medications may make it harder to heal after an injury.
EFFECTS OF LONG-TERM DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE

Changes in brain function or permanent brain damage

Seizure, stroke, heart attack
Liver damage
Pneumonia, tuberculosis
Ulcers

Other Risks
- Depression
- Car crash injuries
- Violence
- Suicide
- HIV/AIDS, hepatitis B or C
- Unwanted sexual contact
- Overdose and death
- Alcohol or drug addiction

Risks for Men
- Impaired sexual performance

Risks for Women
- Breast cancer
- Unplanned pregnancy
**WHY IS SMOKING MARIJUANA A PROBLEM?**

Marijuana’s impact on the developing brain over time can lead to lower lifetime achievement in school and work. Smoking marijuana heavily at a young age can cause symptoms of chronic bronchitis. Its use can lead to car crashes, and there is a risk of addiction in long-time users.

**IS IT A PROBLEM WHEN YOU DRINK AND USE DRUGS TOGETHER?**

**YES!** Combining alcohol and drugs could be deadly.

Mixing energy drinks with alcohol sends mixed messages to your body. Energy drinks contain caffeine and that can make you feel less drunk or high than you really are. That false sense of feeling sober could lead to bad choices like driving a car.

Using alcohol and marijuana leads to effects even greater than each substance’s effects and that can cause problems. Using them at the same time can be especially deadly if you plan to drive, bike, or even walk somewhere.
Prescription medicine and over-the-counter drugs are legal and tested for safety to treat certain diseases. If you don't have a condition that requires taking these drugs, or aren't taking them under a doctor's supervision, they can lead to unexpected side effects. These drugs could mess up your digestion or breathing, change your blood pressure and heart rate, make you feel confused or irritable, make you feel depressed, hostile or paranoid, or even kill you.

I just use over-the-counter medicines or prescriptions I find in the medicine cabinet at home. Are they safe?

I have a health problem. Does that make a difference?

If you have asthma, diabetes, attention deficit disorder (ADD), depression, or some other health issues, alcohol or drugs could make your symptoms worse — and that could mean trouble.
HOW DO I KNOW IF ALCOHOL OR DRUGS ARE BECOMING A PROBLEM?

This may give you some hints.

DID YOU EVER:
• Get in trouble or arrested when using alcohol or drugs?
• Drive drunk or high, or ride with someone who was?
• Miss school or work, or have your grades drop?
• Use alcohol or drugs to relax, feel better, or fit in?
• Plan your day around getting and using drugs or alcohol?
• Need to use more and more to get the same feeling?

Talk to a trusted adult or see page 12 about getting some help.

If you spend more and more money on drugs or alcohol, that’s a problem.

If someone tells you they’re concerned about your use, you may want to check it out.
WHAT IS ALCOHOL OR DRUG ADDICTION?

The more you use alcohol or drugs the more your brain can change. The more often you use, the more alcohol or drugs you may need to use to feel the same. Addiction makes you crave drugs or alcohol just so you can feel normal. Alcohol or drugs become more important than anything else — more important than the people you care about, your safety, or your future. Then it’s very hard to stop using without help.

People who start using alcohol or other drugs when they are young are much more likely to develop an alcohol or drug use disorder and have lifelong problems.

AREN’T I TOO YOUNG TO GET ADDICTED?

- No one is too young or too old to get addicted.
- It’s easier for teens to get addicted because the part of the brain that helps make good decisions, like not drinking or using drugs, is still developing.
- You can’t cure addiction, but you can manage it. It’s never too late to find out how and get your life back.

If you think you need help, check out the resources on page 12. The sooner you get help, the better.
ARE DRUGS AND ALCOHOL MORE RISKY FOR YOUNG WOMEN?

Women get addicted faster and die sooner than men from alcohol and drugs.

Yes! Women’s bodies have stronger reactions to alcohol and other drugs.

Alcohol and drugs get into women’s bodies faster, so they get high or drunk faster.

- Women who have 1 or 2 drinks a day increase their risk of breast cancer.
- Young women have the added risk of getting pregnant if they have unprotected sex while they are drunk or high.
- If a woman is pregnant and uses drugs or alcohol, she risks her health and the health of her baby.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF ALCOHOL OR DRUG WITHDRAWAL?

Call your doctor if you have any of these signs when you stop drinking or using.

- Severe stomach cramps
- Diarrhea and vomiting
- Sleeplessness
- Racing thoughts
- Fast-beating heart
- Anxiety or depression
- Terrible cravings for alcohol or the drug you are quitting
- Full body shakes
- Seizures

If you have been using alcohol or drugs heavily for a long time, you can talk to your doctor about how to quit in a way that is safe for your body. People in recovery say they feel healthier and feel like they got their lives back.
Most likely, your parents will be glad that you want to get help for your issues with alcohol or drugs. Try talking to them.

If you need to talk to someone else, try:
• Your doctor or health care provider
• Your school counselor or school nurse
• A substance use counselor
• Your local youth worker
• Other trusted adults, like your priest, rabbi, imam, or minister. They can help you and support your decision not to use drugs or alcohol.

These people can help with a friend’s problem, too.

ALCOHOL AND DRUGS ARE EVERYWHERE. HOW CAN I AVOID THEM?

Be creative. Think about ways to make good choices before you have to. Practice ways to leave a situation or say, "No thanks." Make sure that you have ways of getting away from risky situations, like calling a person you trust. Continue with your healthy activities, like music or sports. Hang out with friends who don't use alcohol or drugs. Check your local paper or town website for other ideas about what services and activities are near you.
What if my parents drink a lot or use drugs?

It is hard to make healthy choices if your parents are using alcohol or drugs in unhealthy ways. Try talking with your doctor, counselor, or other trusted adults about ways to deal with this. Check the resources in this brochure for more help.

Alateen helps young people recover from the effects of living with family members or friends who have alcohol problems. Call Al-Anon Family Groups of Massachusetts and ask about Alateen at 1–508–366–0556 or visit www.ma-al-anon-alateen.org.
Yes! Here are some sites you can visit and numbers you can call.

What if I want to get some help or find help for a friend? There are special adolescent services for young men and young women, as well as Recovery High Schools for students who got treatment and want to stay in recovery. For more information about these services, contact:

Massachusetts Substance Use Helpline
Free and confidential information and referrals for alcohol and other drug problems and related concerns. Help is available 7 days a week in many languages for people of all ages.

Toll-free: 1-800-327-5050
TTY: Use MassRelay at 711 or 1-800-720-3480
HelplineMA.org

Massachusetts Department of Public Health Bureau of Substance Addiction Services
For substance use and gambling prevention and treatment services in the Commonwealth.
mass.gov/dph/bsas

Massachusetts Health Promotion Clearinghouse
Order or download free materials for all sorts of health issues, including alcohol and other drugs.
mass.gov/MAclearinghouse

National Institute on Drug Addiction (NIDA)
Information, materials, and links about drugs for researchers, parents, health professionals, and students.
www.drugabuse.gov

NIDA for Teens
Facts on how different drugs affect your brain and body, with videos, games, and blog posts.
www.teens.drugabuse.gov
CDC — Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Alcohol and Public Health — Health information and data on alcohol use.
www.cdc.gov/alcohol

CDC Injury Prevention & Control
Health information and data on prescription drug overdose.
www.cdc.gov/injury

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)
Publications and statistics on alcohol and its impact on health and public safety.
www.niaaa.nih.gov

Stop Underage Drinking
Resources to help young people understand what alcohol can do to their bodies and brains, and how to refuse it.
www.stopalcoholabuse.gov/youth.aspx

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
Programs and campaigns for recovery treatment; offers a nationwide treatment locator and suicide prevention information.
www.samhsa.gov

Other Resources

Massachusetts Smokers' Hotline
Talk with someone about quitting smoking.
Toll-free: 1-800-QUIT-NOW or 1-800-784-8669
TTY: 1-888-229-2182

AA Meetings
Ask about young people’s meetings focused on alcohol or drugs.
www.aa.org/pages/en_US

Alateen Meetings
Groups for youth from families with substance use problems.
1-508-366-0556
www.ma-al-anon-alateen.org

National Association for Children of Alcoholics
www.nacoa.org

Asking Questions Improving Health.