

Signs & Symptoms

Some guidelines taken from the American Council for Drug Education are as follows: [1]

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF ALCOHOL/DRUG USE

It is important to keep in mind that if an individual shows any of the following symptoms, it does not necessarily mean that he or she is using drugs. The presence of some of these behaviors could be related to stress. Others may be symptoms of depression or a host of other problems. Whatever the cause, they may warrant attention, especially if they persist or if they occur in a cluster.

The key is change; it is important to watch for any significant changes in your loved one's appearance, personality, attitude or behavior.

For additional information, contact a professional at The Prairie Center: 217-328-3500.

Physical Signs

- Loss of appetite, increase in appetite, any changes in eating habits, unexplained weight loss or gain.
- Slowed or staggering walk; poor physical coordination.
- Inability to sleep, awake at unusual times, unusual laziness.
- Red, watery eyes; pupils larger or smaller than usual; blank stare.
- Cold, sweaty palms; shaking hands.
- Puffy face, blushing or paleness.
- Smell of substance on breath, body or clothes.
- Extreme hyperactivity; excessive talkativeness.
- Runny nose; hacking cough.
- Needle marks on lower arm, leg or bottom of feet.
- Nausea, vomiting or excessive sweating.
- Tremors or shakes of hands, feet or head.
- Irregular heartbeat.

Behavioral Signs

- Change in overall attitude/personality with no other identifiable cause.
- Changes in friends; new hang-outs; sudden avoidance of old crowd; doesn't want to talk about new friends; friends are known drug users.
- Change in activities or hobbies.
- Drop in grades at school or performance at work; skips school or is late for school or work.
- Change in habits at home; loss of interest in family and family activities.

- Difficulty in paying attention; forgetfulness.
- General lack of motivation, energy, self-esteem, "I don't care" attitude.
- Sudden oversensitivity, temper tantrums, or resentful behavior.
- Moodiness, irritability, or nervousness.
- Silliness or giddiness.
- Paranoia
- Excessive need for privacy; unreachable.
- Secretive or suspicious behavior.
- Car accidents.
- Chronic dishonesty.
- Unexplained need for money, stealing money or items.
- Change in personal grooming habits.
- Possession of drug paraphernalia.

Drug Specific Symptoms:

Alcohol: Clumsiness; difficulty walking; slurred speech; sleepiness; poor judgment; dilated pupils; possession of a false ID card (if underage).

Marijuana: Glassy, red eyes; loud talking and inappropriate laughter followed by sleepiness; a sweet burnt scent; loss of interest, motivation; weight gain or loss.

Depressants: (including barbiturates and tranquilizers) Seems drunk as if from alcohol but without the associated odor of alcohol; difficulty concentrating; clumsiness; poor judgment; slurred speech; sleepiness; and contracted pupils.

Stimulants: Hyperactivity; euphoria; irritability; anxiety; excessive talking followed by depression or excessive sleeping at odd times; may go long periods of time without eating or sleeping; dilated pupils; weight loss; dry mouth and nose.

Inhalants: (Glues, aerosols, and vapors) Watery eyes; impaired vision, memory and thought; secretions from the nose or rashes around the nose and mouth; headaches and nausea; appearance of intoxication; drowsiness; poor muscle control; changes in appetite; anxiety; irritability; an unusual number of spray cans in the trash.

Hallucinogens: Dilated pupils; bizarre and irrational behavior including paranoia, aggression, hallucinations; mood swings; detachment from people; absorption with self or other objects, slurred speech; confusion.

Heroin: Needle marks; sleeping at unusual times; sweating; vomiting; coughing and sniffing; twitching; loss of appetite; contracted pupils; no response of pupils to light.

Tobacco/Nicotine: Smell of tobacco; stained fingers or teeth.

Relapse Warning Signs

Chemical dependent individuals can demonstrate relapse behaviors at anytime throughout their recovery process, but they are especially prone during the early stages of recovery. The relapse process starts when an individual falls into old patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving. The following are signs of relapse at any stage in recovery:

- Lack of gratitude for recovery or what has been achieved in the recovery process.
- Complacency when things begin to improve - the chemically dependent person believes that they no longer need to focus on their recovery effort; they are convinced they will never use again.
- Lack of self-care as they become exhausted, develop or return to irregular eating habits or poor health habits in general.
- Self-pity - the chemically dependent person talks and acts as if no one has it as bad as they do.
- Increasing denial or return to denial - the chemically dependent person starts rationalizing, justifying, minimizing or generalizing addictive thinking and behavior.
- Blaming others instead of taking personal responsibility for one's own thoughts, feelings or behavior.
- Unable to accept feedback from other who are concerned.
- Isolation and attempting to solve problems on their own; not sharing what is going on with others in the support group.
- Wanting too much too quickly or setting unrealistic goals.
- Attempting to control one's recovery through manipulation and blaming of others for their problems.
- Discounting a recovery program - stopping 12-Step meetings, not utilizing a sponsor or unwilling to allow others to help.