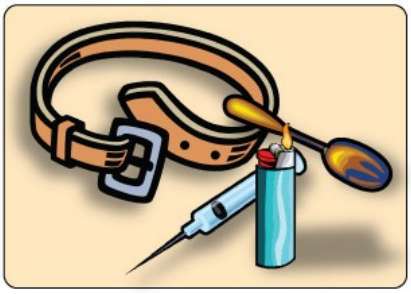
Overdose, Child or Young Adult

An overdose of drugs, alcohol or both can be either accidental or intentional. If this was **accidental**, the overdose could be prevented in the future. Actions need to be taken as soon as possible, and may include:

- Securing medications and alcohol so they are out of reach of children. "Child proof" your home.
- Make sure that medication containers include child-resistant caps.
- Educate your children about the dangers associated with alcohol and drugs and the importance of adult supervision when taking prescribed medication.
- Be sure that all adults who give medication to children are aware of proper dosages and procedures for securing the medications once they are given.
- Contact your local Poison Control Center for more information. Keep their phone number in a place that is easy for everyone to see.
- Remind babysitters or other child caretakers of procedures to take in case the child accidentally ingests drugs or alcohol.
- If you regularly leave your child(ren) in another person's home, be sure they take the same precautions as described above.



If the overdose was **intentional**, it is a very serious situation. Purposely taking more than the prescribed amount of medications (including taking someone else's prescription), abusing street drugs or drinking a dangerous amount of alcohol may indicate your child:

- May be depressed or suicidal.
- Is abusing drugs and took too much or combined different drugs to experiment with the effects.
- Mixed alcohol with drugs and did not realize the danger of doing so (this is, by definition, drug abuse).
- Is suffering from drug and/or alcohol addiction (also known as chemical dependency).
- Engaged in binge drinking.

If you have not been referred to a mental health professional to get help for your child, it is vitally important that you do so right away. Only evaluation by a competent professional can determine which of the above problems may exist and what the best course of long-term treatment is. Your caregiver feels it is safe for your child to leave the care setting at this time because there are no immediate dangers that would require hospitalization. However, it is your responsibility to follow-up.

HOW CAN I TELL IF MY CHILD HAS AN ALCOHOL OR OTHER DRUG PROBLEM?

Some of these signs are easy to see, others are not. However, if you see them happening repeatedly, chances are your child needs help. If your child has one or more of the following warning signs, he or she may have a problem with alcohol or other drugs:

- Getting drunk or high on a regular basis.
- Lying about things, or about how much alcohol or other drugs he or she is using.
- Avoiding you in order to get drunk or high.
- Giving up activities he or she used to do, such as sports, homework or hanging out with friends who do not drink or use other drugs.
- Planning drinking in advance, hiding alcohol, drinking or using other drugs alone.
- Having to drink more to get the same high.
- Believing that in order to have fun you need to drink or use other drugs.
- Frequent hangovers.
- Pressuring others to drink or use other drugs.
- Taking risks, including sexual risks.

- Forgetting what he or she did the night before while drinking (if you tell your friend what happened, he or she might pretend to remember, or laugh it off as no big deal). These are called *black outs*.
- Feeling run-down, hopeless, depressed or even suicidal.
- Sounding selfish and not caring about others.
- Constantly talking about drinking or using other drugs.
- Getting in trouble with the law.
- Drinking and driving.
- Suspension from school for an alcohol- or drug-related incident.

If you feel any of the above problems may apply to your child, here are some suggestions to help keep your child away from all drugs:

- Develop healthy activities and help your child form friendships with people who do not use drugs.
- Keep your child away from the drug scene.
- Tell pushers or former friends your child has better things to do.
- Make sure your child has excuses readily available about why they cannot use. (Example: "My parents drug test me.")
- Ask your family and friends to help your child avoid drug use.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your child appears lethargic, slurs their words, or cannot be awakened.
- You need someone to talk to right now because it should not wait.
- You feel your child is a danger to himself or herself or someone else (suicidal or violent thoughts).
- You feel as though your child is having a new reaction to medications they are taking or they are getting worse after leaving a care center.
- Signs and symptoms of alcohol poisoning include:
  - Unconsciousness or semi-consciousness.
  - Slow breathing--eight breaths or less per minute, or lapses of more than eight seconds between breaths.
  - Cold, clammy, pale or bluish skin.
  - A strong odor of alcohol.
  - If you encounter someone with these signs or symptoms, call your local emergency number (911 in U.S.). Then gently turn this person on his or her side. This helps to prevent choking after vomiting.

Treatment for substance abuse problems among teenagers and young adults often requires specialized care. Treatment centers are listed in telephone directories under:

- Alcoholism and Addiction Treatment,
- Substance Abuse Treatment or Cocaine,
- Narcotics, and Alcoholics Anonymous.

Most hospitals and clinics can refer you to a specialized care center.

The US government maintains a toll-free number for obtaining treatment referrals:

- 1-800-662-4357 or 1-800-487-4889 (TDD) and maintains a website: http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov.
- Other websites for additional information are: www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov and www.nida.gov.

In Canada treatment resources are listed in each Province with listings available under The Ministry for Health Services or similar titles.

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