

Thru Your Own Eyes ... in your own time



What's OK?
What's not?
How much is too much?
How will I know?
...maybe now is the time to find out.

A Teen Drug & Alcohol Self-Assessment Guide



About the Author

Robb McGirr is an addictions counselor and educator. He is currently retired after having served twenty-eight years as a police officer in several municipal police departments in the metropolitan Vancouver area.

His expertise in drugs started as a specialized drug investigator, and an undercover drug operator. His work as an undercover investigator throughout the greater Vancouver and Victoria regions, provided the opportunity to see first hand the dynamics of drug abuse and addiction. Robb has been utilized as a resource instructor for drug investigations and drug



trends training programs at the BC Justice Institute. He was qualified by the BC Supreme Court as an expert in these areas. Since 1982, he has been called upon to provide his expert opinion in over three hundred criminal and civil cases.

For the last twenty years, Robb has focused on the area of teen drug trends. His recognition of the benefits of prevention and early-intervention has motivated him to develop, and support a number of community-based drug response strategies. He has provided his expertise in community prevention and intervention strategies to various communities in BC and Alberta. Along with this guide, Robb has also authored a parents' guide on understanding and responding to teen drug use called "Teen Drug Trends (revised 1999, 2005, 2007). Over thirty thousand copies have been distributed province-wide.

In 1998 – 99, he was involved in developing and initiating a community response strategy to cope with the dramatic increase in teen heroin use. His efforts in this area resulted in his receiving the BC Lieutenant Governor's Award for meritorious service. He has also received a variety of professional commendations, and community awards for his work in prevention and intervention of drug abuse, and youth violence.

Robb now divides his time between offering workshops, and training programs on at-risk youth issues for parents, professionals and youth throughout the province and working for the Surrey School District as a school-based substance use counselor and educator.

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Part 1 – Where I'm At

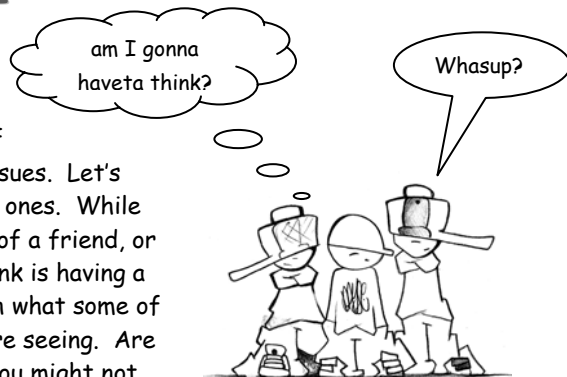
DRUGS OF CHOICE

Ok. So let's get started with the interesting stuff first.

We all know that there are a lot of drugs out there. Lots of choices, each with their own issues. Let's walk through some of the main ones. While you're doing that, try to think of a friend, or someone you know, who you think is having a problem with it. Think through what some of those problems are that you are seeing. Are there any others that maybe you might not see? **In short, where do you think the line is for each of these drugs?**

And what has to happen to someone to know they have stepped over it? A friend of mine calls it the "stupid line".

So...where do you think the "stupid line" is for some of these drugs?



ALCOHOL

YES it's a drug! It's been around our culture for hundreds of years, and we still haven't seemed to get our crap together with it. Look around. **There are very few of us that haven't experienced something negative about alcohol. Drunks fighting, impaired driving and car crashes, family arguments, injuries, date rape, addiction.** All these events and more, are firmly rooted in alcohol abuse. Besides addiction, one of the single biggest issues for teens is maybe the way you drink. It's referred to as "binge drinking".

Binge Drinking

It happens in a lot of different ways. Maybe you're just not used to how alcohol acts on your body and you just keep knocking it back until you start to feel drunk. **Problem is you gotta understand** that the feeling you're getting is just the first few bottles or drinks you've had. All the rest that you drank is still getting into your bloodstream...so you're going to get a lot drunker in the next hour or so!

Maybe you're only allowed out for a short time and you want to get drunk then try to sober up before you have to go home, so you drink it as fast as you can. Or maybe, you just want to get plastered to tune everything out.

Whatever the reason, here's something to consider...

YOUTH DRUG & ALCOHOL INFORMATION HOTLINE

This is a toll free phone number that is province wide. You don't have to be freaking out or in "crisis" to call them. You can call 24 hours a day and just ask them for help getting a number or address of the nearest drug and alcohol counseling service for youth.

The number is 1-800-663-1441

If you live in the lower mainland
they'll ask you to call direct at
604-663-1441

DRUG AND ALCOHOL COUNSELORS

If you end up talking with a counselor make sure you are comfortable with them. If they don't seem to work for you just tell them that you're not comfortable. That's really common and they won't be bothered by it at all. They will understand and work it out, or even may introduce you to someone else and see if that person works better for you. They know that the most important thing is for you to feel at ease and connected with who you're talking to.

AT HOME

I know this may sound stupid, but it is worth thinking about. If you get to a place where you can understand the benefit of your parents knowing where you're at (and hopefully you do eventually), then getting them involved in counseling will really help you. A counselor can help train them to understand that forcing or pressuring you to change doesn't work very well. They can help teach your parents to listen to you more, and to find better ways to help reduce stress between you and them. (Remember the letter thing?) They can translate a lot of things you need to say to your parents without pissing them off as much.

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RESOURCE PAGE

These books get passed around a lot of areas so instead of listing dozens of phone numbers and addresses that can change in a few months, I'm going to list the "types" of places and people you should look for. They can either help you directly or connect you with the people you need.

YOUR SCHOOL

Many schools have a Drug Prevention counselor that either works in the school or comes in regularly. They're probably your best place to connect first.

If your school doesn't have one, then go to your school counselor or youth worker and just ask for them to connect you with a "Youth Drug Counselor". They always have a list of the community resources.

If your school has a police liaison officer, you can ask them for help to connect with one (no, they won't bust you, or ask you to rat out on your friends or call your parents).

Don't forget that special teacher either. You know the teacher that just seems to get it about kids and is always really easy to talk to. Asking them to look up a phone number or contact person works well.

YOUR COMMUNITY

If you have a teen or youth center, the staff there will listen and help to introduce you to a community drug counselor. Most centers have counselors that they know and can call them to come to a center or meet you in a park or something (that's called an outreach worker). Some even have offices in youth centers.

Most communities have drug and alcohol clinics or resource centers that have youth counselors. Every place that deals regularly with youth will have their number and address (they are free to use)

YOUR DOCTOR

Your own family doctor can also refer you to a youth counselor. They will keep it confidential as well. It's also a great idea to let them know where you're at with drugs or alcohol so they can do a physical on you to keep you healthy. A lot of physical problems are associated with substance misuse like stomachaches, headaches, sleeping or eating problems, and stress related illnesses.

Your right to make your own choices is pretty important to you right? You don't really like it when others (particularly adults) tell you what to do. **You have the right to choose most things right? Well maybe you can understand when you go out and binge drink that you let go of your right to choose. Only this time you gave it over to the alcohol.**

Here are a few questions to ask yourself:

- ◆ *Have you ever gotten so drunk that you couldn't remember what you did or where you went?*
- ◆ *Have you ever gotten so drunk and ended up in a serious fight or argument with someone who is normally your friend, and you don't know why? (being an angry or violent drunk)*
- ◆ *(for you girls) ... Have you ever gotten intimate with someone and not remembered how or what happened. Or... If you did remember, realized it was with someone you normally would never have considered doing it with? Have you ever been "date raped" and not known it until someone told you later?*
- ◆ *(for you guys)... Have you ever been so drunk that you tried to (or did) have sex with a drunk girl even though you knew she really didn't want to, or she was trying to say "no"?*
- ◆ *Have you ever gotten so drunk that you ended up really, really sick, or hurt yourself accidentally, or even on purpose?*

You probably get the point here. If you've answered "yes" to one or more of these questions then maybe you can understand how binge drinking can turn you into someone else, and take your ability to make your own choices away.

Do you know anyone who drinks like that?

You know...the guy or the girl that everyone else has to waste their night taking care of them, or worse, they end up dumping them off somewhere so they can still go out and have a good time without them. If it happens all the time, then they become such a pain in the ass. You try to help them and then they puke all over your Sean John jeans, or they piss their pants or something else as gross.

Then everyone spends the rest of the week at school making jokes about them right?

If you've been in some of those places then what do you do about it? Maybe you might want to consider that if you need to drink, then SLOW DOWN a little. Know your limits and stop when you reach them.

You may even enjoy the night. At least you will still be making choices that are your own.

Alcoholism, "Am I addicted to alcohol?"

Here are some questions to ask:

- ◆ *Have you ever watched someone drink and felt anxious or nervous because you couldn't?*
- ◆ *How often do you drink during the week?*
- ◆ *Are you drinking more and getting less drunk?*
- ◆ *Do you find yourself drinking alone very often?*
- ◆ *How much of your day do you spend thinking about drinking?*
- ◆ *Do you get drunk before you get to the party?*
- ◆ *Have any of your "drinking" buddies told you that you drink too much?*
- ◆ *Do you start to feel sick if you haven't had a drink for awhile?*

Do you know someone who you think drinks too much? Compare their drinking habits to yours.

**Did you answer "yes" to some of these questions?
Maybe it's time to think about slowing down, stopping
or even talking to someone you trust about it.**

POT

So you go out and blaze a little with your buddies. A Sesh here, a Sesh there, no big deal right? I mean it's not like getting shit-faced on alcohol. And it's natural. Everyone does it. They're even talking about making it legal. It calms me down when I'm stressed out. It's just about sitting around chillin' and listening to music, or hanging out. It helps me concentrate (ya right).

I'm ok with that, you say. Everyone's ok with that right? Chronic is alright by you.

Ok, maybe so... Let's look a little closer.

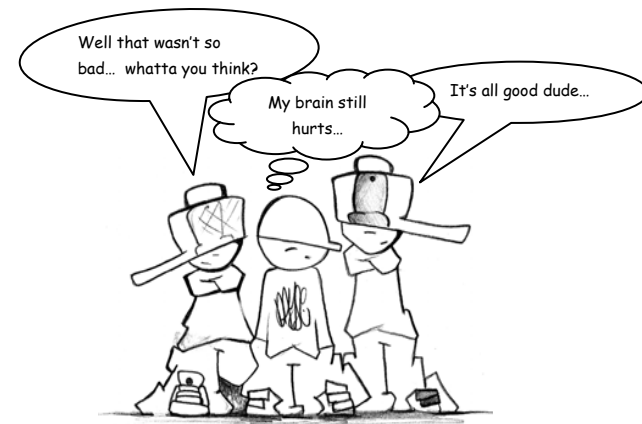


Or maybe you just need to walk up to them and say "Hey, I need a little help here!" Whatever it is, they can probably help you walk your way through this in a way that **CAN** work for you.

Think About It!

On the Resource Page (p.32) there are some ways for you to connect with someone who is qualified and experienced in helping. Take a look!

So that's it! I'm hoping you got some value from this stuff. The fact that you've read all the way to this page tells me you've got an open mind and you're willing to look at things. Hey, that's pretty cool, and you need to go look into the mirror and pat yourself on the back! 'Cause you deserve it! Now if you really want to take this to the next level, go find a friend and talk about this stuff with them and see where it takes you.....or them. Peace!



If you have any questions, or comments please email me.
Maybe some of your ideas or experiences can help someone else.
It would be great to hear from you.

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and
To Gord... Your gentle spirit still inspires me...rest in peace brother.

- ◆ *You've written down as many of your triggers that you can think of.*
- ◆ *You've picked out a few that seem to be fairly easy to avoid and change.*
- ◆ *You've talked with your friends (who use) who you think would understand your decision to reduce or stop your use, and they've accepted most of it.*
- ◆ *You've written down some things you enjoy that don't involve drugs or alcohol and maybe you can use some of them to replace those "triggers" you're going to avoid or change.*

This is what some people would call the "preparation" stage. It's the time for you just to slow down a little and think out what you'd like to accomplish here. Most people think they can just decide to stop or cut down and the next day they just start. Sometimes it can work that way, and that's great! But for most of us it doesn't last too long and we slip back. A lot of the time it helps to have a plan to deal with those times that you just know you're going to walk into where there is a strong temptation to use. That's why knowing those triggers and having a plan thought out ahead of time to deal with them, helps. **If you try to just stop without a plan, that's cool. But if it doesn't work as well as you thought it would, just don't beat yourself up about it.** Try the "making the plan" thing and see if that works better for you.

IT'S JUST TOO MUCH!

Ok, so you've gone this far and it still seems like too much of a step for you. You're stressed out about if this is going to work, and it all seems like so much work. I mean it's just too much for you to wrap yourself around with all the other things that are going on in your life right now, right?

Well, doesn't it just suck to be you! No... not really. Try to understand that this is a place where a lot of other young people have been too. You're not alone here. If it was all so damn easy then we wouldn't be writing books about how to find something that works for you right?

And sometimes trying it on your own just doesn't seem to work the way you want it. So what's the answer to that? **Hey, it's called getting some help.**

DO YOU KNOW there are people out there that probably understand this place you're in, and they are there for one reason...TO HELP YOU OVER THE ROUGH SPOTS. You can tell them where you are at, and what you think you need, and maybe they can open some of those doors for you.

Do you know someone who smokes too much weed? Sure you do. Everyone knows someone who smokes too much weed right? What is it about them? You know, the "stoners". The "Potheads" with Cheech and Chong brain. What's with them?

Time for that closer look again...you know, a few more questions:

- ◆ *How much dope do you smoke in a week... a gram? an eighth? a quarter?*
- ◆ *Do you blaze just on weekends or during the week as well?*
- ◆ *Do you get high at school, or at work?*
- ◆ *Do you get high alone or when you're bored?*
- ◆ *Do you find it hard to sleep, or do you wake up feeling wasted?*
- ◆ *Do you ever "Wake and Bake", (get high in the morning ...to start your day)?*
- ◆ *Do you find it hard to concentrate on more than one thing at a time?*
- ◆ *Do you forget to do things all the time?*
- ◆ *Do you "zone out" during conversations, very often?*
- ◆ *Have any of your friends told you that you smoke too much, or make "jokes" about your dope smoking?*
- ◆ *What's the longest period that you've gone without getting high?...a week?...a month?*
- ◆ *How did that feel?*

**Did you say "yes" to some of these questions?
Do you think you need to make some changes?**

Oh, and here's a thought to twist around.
Did you know that there are more teens (North America-wide) getting treatment for dependence on **POT** than all other drugs and alcohol combined! Go figure...

I know, this is a lot of words for something so simple. But if you hang in there and really write down both your triggers and the other things that don't involve drugs, it will not seem as hard just looking at it or thinking about it...trust me here, OK.

To make this a little easier for you, there is some space here and on the next page for you to write them down:

SOME OF MY TRIGGERS ARE: (after you write them down then circle two or three of the easiest to change)

SOME OF MY TRIGGERS ARE:	
PEOPLE	PLACES
STATE OF MIND	EVENTS
TRIGGERS AT SCHOOL	TRIGGERS AT HOME

COCAINE / CRACK

This one is pretty easy right? Like, you know it's addictive. We all know that. So I guess the questions here are pretty straightforward.

- ◆ *How long have you been using Coke or Crack?*
- ◆ *Are you beginning to use it more often?*
- ◆ *Are you using greater amounts?*
- ◆ *When you're stressed, do you think about using?*
- ◆ *Do you think you can control your use of it?*
- ◆ *What's so different about you, compared to the six million other people in North America who are addicted to Cocaine or Crack who thought they could control it?*
- ◆ *Can you stop? Or is that little voice inside you saying "I don't wanna."?*
- ◆ *Have any of your friends told you that you need to stop?*
- ◆ *What did you say to them? (Did that make sense?)*

Do you need to be a little more honest with yourself here?

Do you feel scared, or uncomfortable when you read this?



CRYSTAL METHAMPHETAMINE

This one is just a no-brainer! I mean a harshly addictive drug that just doesn't give you any room to mess around. If you're using, you gotta have a simple choice. Stop, or you're gonna be screwed. I'm sure any of your friends that know you use it, have said that to you already (unless they use too).

That little voice in your head saying "I don't wanna quit" is made up of white powder and doesn't give a rat's ass what you think!

Just think it through dude and talk to someone you trust. There are people out there that can help you walk through this...that, and maybe read the rest of this book.

So, we've covered some of the main drugs that might be causing you some problems. There are others for sure like Mushrooms, Acid, Ketamine, Oxycontin, and on and on, but I thought it was important to cover these off on their own. If your "drug of choice" is something else, or, if you're using a whole bunch of these (or others), then think of the times that you get high on all of them and ask yourself some of the same questions that you've just read.

Maybe this is a good time to move on and just talk about the drug and alcohol issue in general terms. Read on...

UNDERSTANDING TRIGGERS

Triggers aren't something that make you use. They are simply **where you are most likely to use**. You can break them down into a few categories:

PERSON OR GROUP (when you are with them you almost always get high...like Kevin)

PLACE (someone's house, or a hangout spot where you go and usually get high)

STATE OF MIND (like if you use when you're bored, or stressed, or upset, or even just tired)

EVENT (sometimes it's something special like birthdays or a concert or dance, or 4-20)

Now, take a few minutes and think about when you use. What categories seem to apply to you? Write your triggers down...as many as you can think of. Remember, these aren't the things that **make you use**. They are simply the circumstances **where you are more likely to use**. This isn't about blaming anyone or anything. It's just about you understanding the patterns that have developed about your using.

Finished writing them down? OK, now look them over, and pick two or three of the easiest triggers that you could change or avoid. Not the hard ones, the easiest ones. Let's look at those easy ones that you've picked.

Remember a few pages ago you read about **"for any change to last it needs to be replaced with something that's as enjoyable as what it's replacing"**? OK, now look at those easy triggers that you picked out and ask yourself: **"What can I do to replace those triggers?"**

In order to make that a little easier, try writing down some of things that you enjoy that don't involve getting high. Like, do you enjoy playing music, or free-styling, or rapping, or shopping, or playing ball, or walking...whatever. Write as many of those things down as you can think of. Try to mix it up to include things you do alone, or with friends or family.

Now look at those two or three "easy" triggers, and see if any of them can be replaced with one or more of the things you wrote down that you enjoy without getting high.

Well maybe the first thing he does is he has a talk with his friends. He tells them that he needs to cut back on getting high, and he asks them to help him with it. He asks them not to offer him any weed, and if they need to get high, to do it before or after he meets up with them so he isn't tempted to smoke up too. Nikki and Ryan are OK with that, but Mike starts to tease him about it. Like he holds up a dube and waves it in front of his face laughing.

What's that all about? Well, maybe it's because Mike has been thinking the same thing as Kevin (that they smoke too much dope) but he doesn't want to stop and Kevin is doing something that makes Mike feel like a loser. Or maybe it's because the only thing Mike has in common with Kevin is getting high. I mean, that's how they started to hang out, right?

So Kevin looks at what he does with these three friends. He sometimes plays ball with Ryan, and he goes shopping with Nikki sometimes (she's got good taste in clothes). But he can't remember ever doing anything much with Mike except getting high.

Kevin sees that he can spend time with Ryan and Nikki, without much problem, but he needs to be a little more careful about when and where he hangs with Mike. It's not that Mike "makes" him get high. It's just that Kevin can see that he is more likely to get high when he's alone with Kevin than his other friends. Kevin still wants to hang with Mike, so he just makes sure that when he gets together it's doing something where it is less likely that he will smoke up.

Ok, why did I tell you this story. It's only one example, and you're probably saying "there's a lot more about cutting back or stopping than just chillin' with Kevin". You're right about that. It is only one example. It's called a "**Trigger**", and understanding them will give you an easier way to make those changes.

Let's look at what "**Triggers**" are all about.

LEVELS OF USE

One of the things that you can look at to help you see where you are at, is simply the levels of use, and what they mean. It applies to some drugs and alcohol. Here they are:

CURIOSITY / EXPERIMENTATION

This one is pretty straight forward. It doesn't even mean you're using anything. You just want to know more about it. Some people do the internet thing, or talk to others, or watch someone getting high. The reality is some feel the need to try it to "see for themselves". While there are risks here (for sure, with some drugs), some peoples' curiosity leads them to trying it.

RECREATIONAL USE

So you've tried one or more drugs or alcohol, and you seem to have found one that you like to use every now and then. Almost always in a social setting, like parties or just hanging out and chillin' with friends.

You're probably using only on the weekends, every now and then. There could be a couple of weeks or even a month go by when you don't use anything. Sometimes your use is just "opportunistic" meaning that you don't buy anything and only use when someone happens to have something and offers it to you.

COPING TOOL

Kind of a technical term right? It means your use has increased past using it on weekends or parties or hangin out. You're probably now using during the week or at school. You may be getting high when your alone, or to start the day. You may feel the need to get high to deal with stress or "new challenges" like going to a party where you don't know anyone.

Using when you're just bored is "biggy" here.

It doesn't always mean that you're "addicted" but it does mean that you are using drugs or alcohol as a means to deal or "cope" with parts of your life. It's a pattern that can be hard to break if it goes on too long. This is usually where you start to get into some conflict and stress with others (friends, family, school) about your drug or alcohol use, because this is where others will start noticing changes in you... even if you don't.

ADDICTION / DEPENDENCE

Well, this place sucks, doesn't it? How the hell did this happen? Maybe I'm not addicted or dependent. Ya, that's it, I'm ok, I'll stop next month when this happens or that happens, it's not a big deal, get off my back and blah, blah, blah...

STRESS! CONFLICT! and generally just a shitty place to be.

Everyone that's supposed to be my friend, or my family is in my face all the time. (except my friends who use...they understand me).

And the only place where I feel ok is when I'm high...or planning to. It's just too much, and I give up. It will be what it will be. I'm not going to worry about it anymore...



So there they are. There is some important stuff to mention here though.

With some drugs, like Cocaine, Crystal Meth, and some others, the levels of use don't really apply.

It's because they are so addictive and the addiction can develop so fast, that even if you are a so-called "recreational" user, it will probably get out of control anyway.

In other words, you have to know that there are some drugs out there that just can't be messed with without major problems happening pretty quickly.

Try using the "levels of use" for someone you know that drinks, or smokes weed.

Where do you think they are?

Where do you think you are?

Let's put that idea into the drug thing.

So you're smoking way too much dope. You're getting high way too often and you know you have to stop or at least cut it down a lot. Well, the fact is you probably enjoy getting high right. I mean you wouldn't be in this place if you didn't right?

So you stop smoking weed. And you start chewing gum instead.

You're hanging with your friends, watching them blaze, and you're sitting there chewing Dentyne ICE. Ya right. How long is that gonna last?

See what I mean here? If you're going to stop something you like. It will probably be a lot easier if you replace it with something you end up liking as much. Simple idea...but sometimes it's harder to do, than it is to say. But it doesn't have to be like that if you think it through.

let's walk through a few different ways somebody can reduce or stop smoking weed (as an example) in a way that can be a lot easier. Let's make up a story here. It'll be a story about someone who has been smoking way too much weed, and figures it's time to change that. Let's call him Kevin.

Kevin gets high almost every day. Most of the time it's with some friends of his. They smoke on the weekends when they're hanging out and chillin', or at parties. During the week they get high after school and sometimes during the lunch hour.

Kevin also gets high sometimes when he is at home alone. He gets bored, or stressed out and smokes up. Anyway, you get the picture (and so does Kevin). He figures it's time to cut back and maybe even stop. So let's see how Kevin might do that.

The first thing that Kevin knows is that most of the time he gets high is with his friends. He's got three main friends that he really likes... Mike, Ryan, and Nikki. They all get high as much as he does, and Kevin still wants to hang out with them.

So what does he do about that?

So what's the catch? Well there is one, and it's a biggy.

DON'T SAY IT, IF YOU DON'T MEAN IT!

If you think you can say stuff like this just to get them off your back for awhile, then think again dude. This is the stuff that works only when you've come to a place where you've already decided to make a few changes for yourself. **If that's true, then this will be your first successful change. You've helped them to listen to you.**

CHANGES FOR YOU

So what is it about changes? That word gets so overworked here doesn't it? Sorry, but there just isn't another word that works as well, so just get used to it.

There is an important thing to understand here though. I want you to read this next sentence and think about it...



Any change that someone makes in their life needs to be at least as enjoyable as the thing they are trying to replace...otherwise it probably won't last.

Ok, what the does that really mean?

Think about someone trying to lose some weight, (tell this one to your parents, when they try to force a change on you...they should understand this one).

So you want to lose some weight right? And you love chocolate cake. So instead of eating chocolate cake, you decide to eat broccoli. I mean it's healthier and you won't get fat on it right? Problem is, you don't like broccoli anywhere near as much as you like chocolate cake. So you can muster up your willpower, and maybe eat broccoli for awhile. But, what do you think might happen eventually? Ya, right, you're going to start eating chocolate cake again.

LOOKING BACK

Let's take a short trip back in time. **"Where was I before?"** Think back when you first started using or when your curiosity in drugs or alcohol began. For some of you that may be 6 months or so. For others it may be a lot longer than that.

Anyway, here are a few questions to ask yourself.

- ◆ *When I first started using, did I think that I would be using as much as I am today?*
- ◆ *What would I have thought of someone back then who uses as much as I do today?*
- ◆ *Would I have thought they had a problem?*

LOOKING FORWARD

Now let's take a trip forward. **"Where am I heading?"** This one is sometimes a little harder to be honest with ourselves. A lot of teens really don't spend a whole bunch of time looking way ahead. So maybe just look at this with a few simple questions and we'll leave it at that.

- ◆ *If today you're using more than you thought you would when you first started, is it possible you may end up using even more in the future than you are today?*
- ◆ *If not, why not?*

CONFLICT!!!

Now this is a place where we need to spend a little time taking a closer look at.

We all find ourselves in a place of conflict no matter how old we are, or what we do. It sucks, but it's true. We can't escape it all. But for adults, well, they have something you don't, right?



I mean they have **AUTHORITY**. They can make their own rules. They don't have someone always telling them what to do and how to do it, and when to get it done by. While that's not completely true, they don't have to answer to as many people as you do, that's for sure.

But let's take a look at where you are, and see if you have conflict in your life. Here's something to look at.

Circle the answer in the brackets that fits best for you

- ◆ **Do I have much conflict in my life?**
(a little an average amount a whole lot)
- ◆ **Do I feel stressed by conflict often?**
(every day a couple of times a week every now and then)
- ◆ **Where is it usually coming from?**
(school family parents friends money or all of them)
- ◆ **What are they saying to me or doing that stresses me out?**
- ◆ *There may be a lot of different answers to this one. So use the back page of this book and write them down. I left some space there for you to do it.*
- ◆ **Are some of these people in my life telling me that my drug or alcohol use upsets them?** (Yes No)
- ◆ **What do I tell them when they say that?**
- ◆ **What do I want to do when they say that?**
- ◆ **Do I want to agree with them?**
- ◆ **Do I want to get high?**
- ◆ **How often do I have to lie about my drug or alcohol use?**
(rarely occasionally often all the time)
- ◆ **How do you feel about that last question?**

TRY:

Not to tell me what is wrong with my life (even if you know you're right). I already know most of it (after all I live it every day), and reminding me of it just makes me angry.

To give more advice, and less "orders". They both say the same thing, and one is a lot easier to take.

Not to expect me to agree with you when you tell me "what's wrong". Sometimes I get defensive and need some time to think out what you have said before I answer.

To understand that some things that are important to you, are not as important to me right now, not because they are not important, but maybe because something MORE important is happening to me that you don't know.

To understand that I can't tell you everything that you need to know all the time. Sometimes it's because it's personal, but sometimes it's because it's embarrassing, and I'm afraid you won't understand, and it's easier to just keep quiet about it.

To understand that the changes I need to make won't work for very long if they're forced on me.

There's more, but if you can think about these, it would help a lot. And maybe you can write down what you need so I can think about some things you want me to try to do.

Sounds pretty sucky doesn't it? But I'll tell you a secret. There is not a parent alive that is worried about their teen that wouldn't give a big sigh of relief to read something like this. Oh sure, they might not accept it completely, and they may come running to you to explain why they are doing what they're doing, and tell you "the way it is". But over the long run it gives them a message that they can't walk away from. It gives you something to point to and calm things down when conversations start to get tense. In short, it gives them some ground rules in a way they can understand to respect your thoughts and feelings.

That doesn't mean you have to confess everything to them. You may not be ready for that. But it does mean that if you give them a little more information, and let them know what you need from them, then maybe they won't spin out and stress you out as much.

OK, so what do you say to them, and how do you say it? If you can package it into "their" language, you'll probably have a lot better chance in getting them to understand. And, sometimes it's hard to figure out how to do that. **So here's a thought. Instead of "talking" to them and having to hope they don't interrupt you or shut you down with a bunch of advice, try just writing it down and giving it to them so they can read it privately without having to respond to it.** Tell them to read it and think about it and you want to hear what they have to say later. (Parents really like that kind of stuff!)

I'm going to throw in an example here. Now, I know it's probably not the way that you (or any other teen for that matter) speaks, but it is the way that parents and other adults listen. And remember, this is supposed to make things better for YOU right? So here goes...

I know you're worried and upset about what you think is going on with me lately. And, I know that when you tell me what you want me to do it's because you care. It's become uncomfortable between us and I need you to read this so you can understand the place I'm in a little better.

I am thinking about making some changes, and it's important for you to know that. I'm not sure what they are going to be, or even exactly how I'm going to do it. But it's also important for you to understand that when you "tell" me what to do and how to do it, and try to make those changes for me, that it sometimes creates more stress for me. And all I want to do is walk away and hide from it all.

I'm going to ask you to do a few things for me. I think it will help me look at some of the changes I need to deal with. I think it will reduce some of the stress for me, and some of the fear for you. I need you to try a few things for me...

I guess the picture I'm trying to paint here is...

- ◆ *How much conflict in your life today is associated to drugs or alcohol use? Even if you don't think it's a problem and others are the ones making a big deal of it.*
- ◆ *How often do you deal with the stress of conflict in your life by getting, or wanting to get high?*
- ◆ *How do you feel about that?*

Here's another important question to ask yourself...

How much less conflict would I have in my life if I was using less or not using at all?

There is a saying familiar to most people who are trying to get over substance abuse issues... it goes like this:

First, it's just fun...
Then, it's fun with problems...
Then, it's just problems.

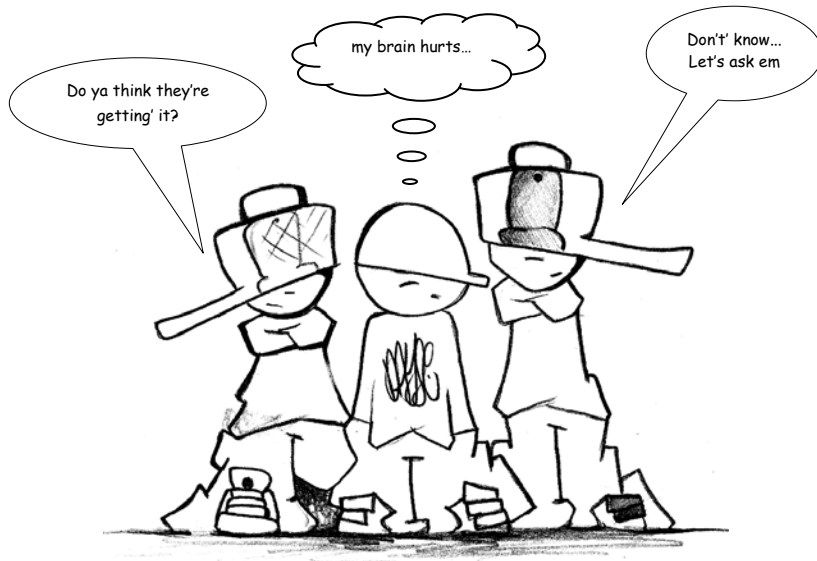


SELF-ASSESSMENT QUIZ

We've run through some of the areas that raise questions about drugs or alcohol. You've had a chance to look at some of the answers that you came up with. Now let's try something to put those answers into perspective for you.

Here's a short quiz for you to do. It covers six different areas of our lives. In each area there are a few statements with a box beside them. Take a pencil and check off each statement that you think applies to you.

When you finished add up each of the boxes you checked in each area and write the number down. Then add up the total.



Note: My Thanks to Terry Bulych of Vancouver Coastal Health who developed most of the following "Self Assessment" tool, and gave us permission to use it here. Also thanks to the students at Journey, for adding some of their own items on the quiz.

Part 2 – Where I Want to Be

MAKING SOME CHANGES



Still a little curious? Good. Making some changes may seem hard, but if you just slow down and think it through a little you may find that some of them may not be all that difficult.

Probably someone in your life is already trying to shove some changes into your face..."stop doing this!", or "start doing that!", "It's not that hard!",

"Just try it!". Does this sound a little familiar? Usually it's from your parents, or a teacher, or maybe even some of your friends. It probably pisses you off more than helps (there's that conflict thing happening again right?).

SENDING SOME MESSAGES

(training your parents)

First thing you might want to do is to consider cutting them a little slack. Try to remember that they may be saying the wrong things to you, but they're saying it because they care about you and that's a cool thing right? It's really hard for someone to get into your head and know the right thing to say and the right time to say it in a way that doesn't sound pushy or harsh.

So here's a thought. **Maybe one of the first changes you can try is to get them to change a little about how they are trying to "help" you. That way, you can feel like you have more control of your own direction.**

Something to remember...the people in your life who are important to you, can only act on the information that they have. Usually, by the time you are in this place (like reading this book), you haven't been telling people a whole lot about how you're really feeling or what you're really doing. That means "they" (your parents, maybe even your teachers or friends), are spending a lot of time "reading in between the lines". So they probably don't have a clue where you are really at, and they end up saying or even thinking the wrong thing. When you add in their own fear about where you're at, things they say can get kinda painful to listen to.

CONCLUSIONS

Drugs or alcohol have negatively affected my life in _____ ways. <i>(your total score)</i>
Was it higher than you thought it would be? <i>Yes No About what I expected</i>
What areas seemed to have the highest number? <i>Family Health School Friends Money Mental Health</i>
Were you surprised about some of the scores? <i>Yes No About what I expected</i>
Have you been stressed lately about those areas of your life that had the higher scores? <i>Yes No</i>
Is your score too high for you? <i>Yes No</i>
If it's not too high, how high would the score have to honestly be before you thought it was too high? (In other words, "how much higher does it have to go?") <i>(write down the score) _____</i>
Now, take a few minutes and look at the answers you gave. What do you think about them?
Is it time to consider making a few changes about your drug or alcohol use? <i>(circle your answer) YES NO</i>

If your answer is "No, I think I'm ok", then I want you to do something...put this book away someplace. Stash it in a drawer or something. In a few months or so, pull it out and take another look at the answers you gave. Maybe even read through the first part too.

Then ask yourself if anything has changed for the better or for the worse?

If you think you want to explore a little about making some changes, then **READ ON..... !**

Self Assessment Quiz

Put a checkmark beside the statements that apply to you

Family

- More arguments & fights with parents
- More fights with brothers & sisters
- Breaking family rules (curfews etc)
- Not wanting to spend time with your family
- Running away from home (or wanting to)
- Being kicked out of home (or threatened to)
- Not wanting your parents to meet your friends
- Lying to your parents
- Feeling guilty about hurting your family
- Keeping more and more secrets from your family
- Feeling different from your family
- Exposing your family to negative people by using the home to use or deal drugs
- Being defensive or having an "angry" attitude
- Feeling fear at being caught by family members

Total _____ out of 14

Friends

- Your old friends stop hanging with you
- Most of your "new" friends use drugs or alcohol
- Some of your friends are telling you to stop or slow down on your use of drugs or alcohol
- Your girlfriend/boyfriend dumped you (or has threatened to) because of drugs or alcohol
- Other teens make jokes or put you down about you being a "stoner" or "drunk"
- You're starting to lie to your friends
- Most of your time with friends is about doing or talking about drugs or alcohol

Total _____ out of 7

Self Assessment Quiz

Put a checkmark beside the statements that apply to you

School / Work

- Not completing homework, studying, or assignments
- Skipping class and using
- Grades slipping
- Failing classes
- Getting suspended or expelled
- Unable to concentrate / easily distracted
- Having poor memory
- Feeling "dumb"
- Withdrawing from school activities (sports, clubs, etc.)
- Having a poor attitude about school in general
- Very little motivation (looking for a job)
- Difficulty finding a job
- Being fired from a job

Total ____ out of 13

Money

- Spending most of your money on drugs or alcohol
- Always feeling "broke"
- Owing friends or dealers money
- Worrying about paying off debts
- Being targeted with violence or threats because of debts
- Selling drugs
- Exchanging sexual favors for drugs or money
- Stealing from home or family
- "Jacking" other youth for money, property
- Being arrested
- Being charged with a criminal offence
- Rebelling against Authority
- Feeling fear or paranoia about police or other authority figures

Total ____ out of 13

Self Assessment Quiz

Put a checkmark beside the statements that apply to you

Your Mental Health

- On edge when you're not using
- Feeling anxious or nervous
- Feeling depressed or hopeless
- Confused sometimes
- Feelings of guilt
- Feelings of shame (I'm no good...I'm a bad person)
- Feeling bored with your life
- Feeling numb (feeling nothing at all)
- Having cravings when you don't use
- Having an "I don't care" attitude
- Feeling like you want to just give up
- Having suicidal thoughts
- Attempting suicide

Total ____ out of 13

Your Physical Health

- Low energy
- Tired all the time
- Sleeping in on school days
- Sleeping during the day
- Difficulty going to sleep at night without using
- Increased coughing
- Frequent colds, flu, or other illness
- Shortness of breath when exercising or active
- Headaches
- Losing weight
- High risk sexual activity (unsafe sex)
- Regrets about sexual choices
- Physical injuries resulting from accidents while using

Total ____ out of 13