Adolescent Development and Behavior

Signs and Symptoms of Abuse

Middle School and Early High School Years:

1. Movement Towards Independence
   - Struggle with sense of identity
   - Feeling awkward or strange about one’s self and one’s body
   - Focus on self, alternating between high expectations and poor self-esteem
   - Interests in clothing style influenced by peer group
   - Moodiness
   - Improved ability to use speech to express one’s self
   - Realization that parents are not perfect; identification of their faults
   - Less overt affection shown to parents, with occasional rudeness
   - Complaints that parents interfere with independence
   - Tendency to return to childish behavior, particularly when stressed

2. Future Interests and Cognitive Changes
   - Mostly interested in present, with limited thoughts of the future
   - Intellectual interests expand and gain in importance
   - Greater ability to do work (physical, mental, emotional)

3. Sexuality
   - Display shyness, blushing, and modesty
   - Girls develop physically sooner than boys
   - Increased interest in sex
   - Movement toward heterosexuality with fears of homosexuality
   - Concerns regarding physical and sexual attractiveness to others
   - Frequently changing relationships
   - Worries about being normal

4. Morals, Values, and Self-Direction
   - Rule and limit testing
   - Capacity for abstract thought
   - Development of ideals and selection of role models
   - More consistent evidence of conscience
   - Experimentation with sex and drugs
Chemical Dependent Adolescents

- Socially withdrawn: stays in their room a lot or just wants to be alone
- Identifies themselves as a “druggie” is obsessed with drug-using activities
- Becomes excessively moody
- Debates and argues with authority
- Rejects previously held values and authority (church, respect for teachers, pastor, etc.)
- Blames others for their own feelings
- Peculiar odors of marijuana, alcohol, or solvents on your child, on their clothing, in the house or in the car
- Presence of drug paraphernalia in your child’s laundry
- Use of eye drops, room deodorizers or incense
- Slurred speech
- Noticeable change in school performance
- Sudden change in social pattern (friends, activities, choice of music that is different)
- Secretiveness about friends or activities
- Loss of motivation or interests
- Deterioration in physical appearance (general unhealthy appearance, blood shot eyes, lack of alertness, decrease in neatness or personal hygiene)
- Involvement with legal problems or delinquency
- Wanting to sell their stuff
- Extreme dress, language, opinions or behavior

Just because these things listed under chemically dependent behavior does not necessarily mean the child has a drug problem; what it means is to take notice and start making an effort to ask more questions, be more involved to find out what is going on with the child.