

Spotting the Signs

Use Your Nose: Have a real, face-to-face conversation when your son or daughter comes home after socializing with friends. If there has been drinking or smoking, the smell will be on their breath, on clothing and in their hair.

Look them in the Eyes: When your child gets home after going out take a close look. Pay attention to their eyes. Eyes will be red and heavy-lidded with constricted pupils if they've used marijuana. Pupils will be dilated and they may have difficulty focusing if they've been drinking. Red, flushed colour to the face and cheeks can also be a sign of drinking.

Watch for Mood Changes: How does your son/daughter act after a night out? Are they loud and obnoxious, or laughing hysterically at nothing? Unusually clumsy to the point of stumbling into furniture and walls, tripping over their own feet and knocking things over? Sullen, withdrawn, and unusually tired? Do they look queasy and stumble into the bathroom? These are all signs that they could have been drinking, using marijuana or other drugs.

Keep an eye out for deceit/ secretiveness: Are their weekend plans starting to sound fishy? Are they being vague about where they're going? Can they describe the event they've said they're attending? Do they say parents will be at the party they're attending, but can't give you a phone number and then come home acting drunk? Do they get in way past their curfew/ estimated time with an endless string of excuses? When excuses fail, do they respond to your inquiries and concern by telling you that it's none of your business? If any of these ring true, it's time to take action.

Should You Search Their Room?

The limits you set with your child do not stop at their bedroom door. If you notice concerning changes in behaviour, unusual odours wafting from their room (e.g. marijuana or cigarette smoke), smells to mask other smells like incense or air fresheners, or other warning signs, it's important to find out what's going on behind that "KEEP OUT" sign.

But be prepared to explain your reasons for a search, whether or not you decide to tell them about it beforehand. You can let them know it's out of concern for their health and safety. If you discover that they're *not* drinking or doing drugs, this could be a good time to find out if there's something else that needs addressing. Young people come up with crafty places to conceal alcohol, drugs, and drug paraphernalia. Some possible hiding spots include:

- Dresser drawers beneath or between clothes
- Desk drawers
- CD/DVD/Tape/Video cases
- Small boxes – jewellery, pencil, etc.
- Backpacks/duffle bags
- Under a bed
- In a plant, buried in the dirt
- Inside books with pages cut out
- In between books on a bookshelf
- Makeup cases – inside fake lipstick tubes or compacts
- Under a loose plank in floor boards
- Inside over-the-counter medicine containers
- Inside empty sweet bags such as M&Ms or Skittles

Don't overlook your child's mobile or other digital devices. Do you recognise their frequent contacts? Do recent messages or social media posts hint at drug use or contradict what they've told you? If your search turns up evidence of drug use, **prepare for the conversation ahead and do not be deterred by the argument of invaded privacy.** Stand by your decision to search and the limits you've set.