

Q & A Mindline



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Q My son is 19 years old and tends to drink with his friends. How can I determine if he has a drinking problem? Is it possible for him to get addicted to drinks, even if he drinks occasionally?

It's important to have a good communication and interaction with young ones at home to ensure that they approach you first, in an event of crisis and for discussion and guidance. Further, when it comes to a thing like drinking, it's best to talk openly and frankly to your children because contrary to misperceptions, the younger generation is quite amenable to conversation and introspection.

In the meantime, dispel your worries by this simple formula of LOOK, ASK and LISTEN.

LOOK for evidence of alcoholism - slurry and incoherent speech, wobbly gait, blood shot eyes, sign of injury from a fall or fights, frequently being inebriated after a party or a drinking session. Besides, excess drinking can lead to self-neglect - dirty clothing, untidy room, disorganized personal belonging etc. Equally, look for empty

bottles in the vehicle or room.

ASK whether his drinking is regular or daily and if it is by any chance consumed in excess. Note if he justifies intake and expresses a desire to **C**ut down, feels **A**ngry about being questioned about his intake, expresses **G**uilt regarding his alcohol consumption and drinks alcohol as an **E**ye opener. This is based on the simple 'CAGE' questionnaire commonly used for screening potential alcohol problems. Two 'yes' responses indicate a possibility of alcoholism and warrants further exploration (by a specialist).

LISTEN attentively when you speak to your children. Deep listening facilitates communication. Try and understand reasons for occasional or frequent excesses in drinking, if any. Consider peer pressure and/or avoidance of being the 'odd one out,' and as a result, joining drinking sessions.

Q A friend of mine drinks occasionally but consumes huge amounts of alcohol in a short period of time to get high. Is that better than someone who drinks a bit every day?

You are referring to 'binge drinking,' which is consuming a lot of alcohol in a short period of time or drinking to get drunk. Neither binge drinking nor drinking on a daily basis is healthy. Researchers define binge drinking as consuming eight or more units (see below to understand unit of alcohol) in a single session for men and six or more for women.

Alcohol has a disinhibiting effect on individuals and can make them prone to callous and reckless behaviour, especially if intoxicated in a short span of time. It significantly increases risk for

unintentional injuries (accidents, falls), intentional injuries (firearm injuries, sexual assault and domestic violence), alcohol poisoning, unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

It is important to understand alcohol in units, so that one can count their drinks more effectively. Units are a fundamental concept used in alcohol guidelines. A large peg of whisky has 2 -2.5 units of alcohol, a can of regular beer has about 1.5 units and 175ml glass of wine contains 2 units.

Q My father who is 60 years old, gets very restless when he can't have alcohol for a couple of days. Please advise.

He might be experiencing alcohol withdrawal features which are characterized by shakes, restlessness, irritability and impatience. These features are guided by sudden withdrawal or reduced intake of alcohol after a period of regular drinking. Similarly, one may experience craving, characterised by an intense urge to drink alcohol, which again is manifested as restlessness.

I suggest you consider the duration, frequency and amount of alcohol your father has been consuming and look for physical signs of withdrawal, especially tremors of his hands, physical inability to sit down, marked sweaty and clammy skin and associated sleep disturbance. If these early withdrawal features are evident, medical and/or psychiatric evaluation is recommended at the earliest to explore alcohol dependency and any associated health hazard that he may already be afflicted with.

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