



I'm worried about my friend's escalating drug use

Question

Dear Alice,

I have a friend at school who quit smoking last year in January 2003, and went back to it in October 2003. I have no idea why, and he also started doing other drugs, such as smoking blunts, doing ecstasy, and taking steroids. The drug that I am worried about him doing the most is ecstasy, because it's a dangerous drug. Also, he is always talking about doing drugs. How can I help him? I still want him to be my friend. Please help. This is serious.

Answer

Dear Reader,

You are right; this is a serious situation. And yes, ecstasy is a dangerous drug. So, too, are cigarettes, blunts, and steroids. It sounds as though your friend has developed harmful, and potentially dangerous, addictive drug-related behaviors. He's lucky to have you as a friend, because you care and want to help. A friend's drug use can be troubling and unpredictable. While there is no guarantee that he will remain your friend if you approach him about his decisions to use drugs, as his friend, it may be worth the risk.

In terms of *how* to help him, consider the following strategies:

Educate yourself. Learn about drugs and addiction by reading literature, consulting health experts, and tapping into local resources. You can gather information online about various drugs and addiction by searching the Alcohol & Other Drugs archive of *Go Ask Alice!* Is there a health educator, guidance counselor, health professional, or supportive family member who you can talk with, ask questions, and/or get support? Gaining knowledge and understanding of drug misuse/abuse and addiction may help you figure out what you can say to your friend.

Think about what you will say. Be specific, and mention your concern for his health. Explain that you're worried about his decisions to use drugs, and tell him how his behavior affects you and/or your friendship. Also, explore the possible reasons behind his drug use. For instance, you might say, "I've noticed you're smoking again and doing other drugs lately. I'm worried about you. Is everything okay?" Or, "I'm worried that your smoking and drug use will cause serious harm to your health." Think about whether his drug use has had a negative impact on his daily activities. For example, has he missed a significant number of classes? Is he sleeping much more or much less than he used to? Also, how has his escalated drug use influenced his relationships? Think about your relationship with him. How have his decisions to smoke and use drugs affected your friendship and the way you feel about him? You might say, "The fact that you talk about drugs all the time worries me, especially since you don't seem to be interested in anything I am doing or in hearing about my weekend, and we used to talk all the time."

Choose a workable time. If and when you decide to talk with him about your concerns, choose a quiet and relaxed environment. Also, make sure he's sober or not high when you have this kind of conversation. It may be appropriate to keep your first approach brief, and caring. If he begins to get angry or hostile, back off and approach him at another time after you've gathered your thoughts.

Prepare for rejection. Your friend may deny that his drug use is a problem or he may become defensive. Don't take this personally; it's often difficult for people to come to terms with their problems. Be persistent: sometimes a person needs to hear worry and concern several times from someone s/he cares about or who cares for him or her before s/he's ready to talk about it.

Challenge your friend to think about his behavior. He may be smoking out of habit. Or, maybe he's so overwhelmed with his troubles that he doesn't know what else to do. Why do you think his behavior has changed so drastically? Often people misuse or abuse alcohol, nicotine, and/or other drugs to deny feelings or to avoid responsibilities. Drug use is also sometimes related to intense feelings. When a person feels overly anxious or scared, depressed, and/or sad, s/he may choose to use drugs to manage and/or get rid of those emotions, which can become a vicious cycle as dependence grows. Did something happen to your friend or to someone in his life around the time he started smoking again? If you do decide to challenge his behavior, he may or may not want to talk with you about it. If he does open up to you, be prepared with ways you can help him. You can offer to hang out with him, step in when the urge to smoke or use drugs comes up, or plan diversions. You can also ask him to smoke and use drugs *less often and at lower levels*. Some people have had success suggesting that a friend "test" his or her habit by going out and relaxing, getting a natural "high," or at least see what it feels like to go out or be with friends without smoking and/or using drugs.

It makes sense that your friend's behavior worries you. During this time, set some limits for how much time and energy you will put into trying to help him. In the long run, this will prevent you from becoming overwhelmed, stressed, or burnt out. You can be supportive and offer suggestions to your friend, but he will have to recognize for himself that what he's doing is harmful and a problem for him before he's ready to change.

For more information, check out the related Q&As.

Health topic
Alcohol & Other Drugs
Helping & Getting Help

Source URL: <:///answered-questions/im-worried-about-my-friends-escalating-drug-use>

List of links present in page

- [://answered-questions/im-worried-about-my-friends-escalating-drug-use](http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/im-worried-about-my-friends-escalating-drug-use)
- <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/what-are-blunts>
- <http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/alcohol-other-drugs>
- [://category/alcohol-other-drugs](http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/alcohol-other-drugs)
- [://category/helping-getting-help](http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/helping-getting-help)
- [://node/17440/printable/print](http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/node/17440/printable/print)