

# DRUG TESTING YOUR TEEN

-Lori Rappaport, Ph.D.

The decision to drug test your teenager is a difficult one. The prospect that your teen could be using drugs is perhaps one of the scariest things imaginable, and often leads us to look for evidence to the contrary. No parent wants to believe that it could be “my child.” When teens use drugs, they will almost always deny it to their parents. Even when a parent threatens to drug test them, the guilty teen will often respond with “go ahead, I’ve got nothing to hide.” Keeping your teen away from drugs may be the single most important thing you ever do for them. It is a way for parents to take control before experimentation turns into a serious accident, drug rehab, jail, a lifetime of addiction or death.

## **Create a Family Drug and Alcohol Policy**

Start talking to your children at an early age about drugs and alcohol. Avoid lectures and instead, give them a chance to participate in discussions and find out what they already know about drugs (you may be surprised). Good communication with your children about these issues makes it much easier to deal with problems that may arise later. Important points to cover:

- Drug education
- A statement of expectations
- A listing of specific restrictions if the policy is not followed
- Most of all, the potential for drug testing.

Most teens understand the threat of drug testing. On the positive side, it gives them an acceptable “excuse” to say no and may take some peer pressure off of them to experiment.

**Why Drug Test My Child?** Drug testing can be done both proactively and reactively. *Proactively* if your child is beginning to hang with the “wrong crowd,” has become more isolated, is spending too much time in their bedroom, loss of interest in previously important activities, periods of unexplained absence from home, but there is no evidence of drug use. *Reactively*, once they have been caught. In this situation, testing can be a stipulation in a home contract, or an agreement to get themselves out of trouble. If they cannot come clean after a few weeks, it is a clear indication that they need more help.

**Doesn’t It Tell Them I Don’t Trust Them?** If you are suspecting drug use, you ***don’t*** trust them. ***In this one area.*** This is a manipulation tool used by teens to cause parents to feel guilty and keep them from doing what they need to do to keep their child safe. It’s OK if you do not trust them. Drug use can get out of control quickly, and the risks can be life threatening. If your teen wants you to trust them, they can take a test and put the issue to rest. Don’t allow your teen to paralyze you with this trust issue.

**What Kinds of Tests Are Available?** The best kind is hair follicle testing, and is best reserved for the teen who is a frequent user, getting caught often and is still denying use. It has to be done at a doctor’s office. Urine tests are the easiest and fastest. You will get positive or negative results, and they can be sent to a lab for levels of each drug if you desire. There is also a saliva test for alcohol. Drug stores have urine tests and they can be costly, but are good for one or two times. If it is a bigger issue requiring regular testing, Redwood Laboratories can mail you a case).

**What Do I Do If They Test Positive?** Is it the first time or the 10<sup>th</sup> time? What is the policy in the house, zero tolerance? What did they test positive for? Start with home based consequences if they respect rules and safety is not compromised (loss of freedoms, therapy, contracts, out-patient services). If the teen cannot stay clean, you will need to up the level of support and consequences (residential rehab, change of school, wilderness therapy).