



6 - SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To recognise how substance use/misuse may present itself in young people
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Preparation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Photocopy signs and symptoms handout Prepared flipcharts Flipchart/pens
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Can be used with	✓ Parents ✓ Staff
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Total Time	46 mins
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METHOD	TIME	TOOLS
1. Explain that signs of substance use are often focused on the physical signs, such as glazed eyes or drunken behaviour. However to meet the needs of young people, it is important to look at all aspects of their lives to recognize how substance use/misuse may present itself.	1 min	
2. Ask participants based on their experience how easy or difficult it is to spot the signs and symptoms of use or misuse. Ask for specific examples. Write examples on the flipchart.	5 mins	Flipchart/pens
3. Give each person a copy of the handout on Signs and Symptoms of substance use and ask them to read through this. Explain that these are brief statements and there could be other examples.	5 mins	Examples of signs and symptoms handout
4. Ask participants to work in pairs. Each pair should give as many examples as possible, based on either their experiences with young people or from ideas in the handout for each of the categories.	10 mins	Writing paper/pens
5. Go around the room asking each pair for a specific example. Put responses on flipchart. Collect the information quickly and save discussion until there are examples for each category.	15 mins	Flipchart paper (split into 4 headings as on the handout)

Disclaimer – Developed 2003 reviewed in November 2009



6. Explore with participants what this exercise has raised in terms of their work practice.	10 mins	
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Examples of Signs and Symptoms (Handout)

Education:

Substance taking or misuse could be causing attendance problems, resulting in temporary or permanent exclusion from school, affecting cognitive ability or concentration through sleep problems or displaying inappropriate or difficult behaviour.

Health:

This could present itself in a variety of ways including: overdose, intoxication, depression, mental health problems, poor diet, weight loss, infections or injuries, physical complications of substance use, Hepatitis/Aids/STI's and blood borne infections via unsafe sex.

Emotional and behavioural development:

Unusually aggressive or passive, either as a result of the substances themselves or as a result of the lifestyle. Substances may be taken to assist coping with emotional difficulties, or may impact on ability to develop emotionally such as a positive self-image. The substances themselves may cause anxiety, depression, self-harm or disinhibition.

A young person's behaviour may alter, which could include: inconsistency, anti-social behaviour, change of peers, social exclusion, difficulty with relationships, isolation or risk of exploitation.

Self care skills:

Substance taking or misuse may be indicated by neglect of physical care or hygiene, loss of interest, spending money on drugs over basic needs such as food or bills, difficulties in a variety of social interactions, for example using drugs to gain confidence in social situations, losing contact with positive social networks, neglecting risk.