

# Lakewood Counseling and Career Center

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## Why Rule Out Chemical Use First?

The teen years are a time of dramatic changes in your child's life: mood swings, changes in friends, challenging rules and authority, and pulling away from family. It is difficult to tell when a child crosses the line from "typical teenager" to problem teen or drug-using teen. As parents, we often do not see that line until after they have crossed it.

When we know that our teen is in trouble, it is difficult to discern if chemical abuse is part of the problem. It is terribly important to rule out chemical abuse at the front end of any diagnostic picture.

Chemical use "clouds" the results or effectiveness of all other intervention options. For example, the results of any academic or psychological assessment are deemed inaccurate when an individual is actively using alcohol or other illegal mood-altering drugs. When an individual is participating in counseling, chemical use prevents him/her from accessing the depths of their thoughts and feelings. In addition, law enforcement knows all too well the impact chemical use has on decision-making and judgment skills. Without question, chemical use is a major contributor in automobile accidents.

Over time, the chemical becomes the primary relationship of the using individual. Their relationship is often a secret one with feelings of paranoia, defensiveness, and protectiveness. The user will lie, cheat, and steal to maintain the secret relationship with the chemical. Because of this, it may be a difficult process to discern that chemical use is the issue. It will require patience, diligence, asking tough questions, and following through on agreed upon plans.

It is time well spent determining if chemical use is part or the entire source of the behaviors of concern you have identified. Otherwise, you, your child, and the professional you are seeking help from are literally wasting valuable time, resources, and money.