

Lakewood Counseling and Career Center

6607 18th Avenue South • Suite 101 • Richfield, MN 55423 • 612-798-7373 • Fax 612-243-3615

Is It OK To Search Your Child's Room?

If you have the question about whether or not you should search your child's room, there probably are specific concerns or alarms that have been sounded for you. Searching a child's room without their consent or knowledge can feel like a breach of trust.

Keep these three thoughts in mind:

1. The need to maintain and protect a child's safety/health overrides their right to privacy.
2. Chemical abuse/dependency is a sneaky, cunning and dishonest process. Sometimes parents have to be less than forth-right in getting to the bottom of the truth.
3. Be prepared to find something. Many times your gut intuitions are right and they need to be followed-up. So have a plan of what you will do if you find something.

You have two options available in doing a room search:

1. Search the room **with** your teen and spend a good deal of time going through some of the suggested steps in this packet.
2. Search his/her room alone and gather data for a later intervention.

If you feel there is a total breach of the relationship with your child, it may be less volatile to search their room alone. You can deal with the confrontation later if you have confirmed your concerns by finding alcohol, drugs, or paraphernalia.

How to search a room:

- Find a time when you can conduct an overall search. Look in areas that are the most hidden spaces in your teen's room. Some suggestions include: shoeboxes, inside the facing of stereo speakers, underneath lamps, inside ceiling tiles, inside clothing packets in closets, inside small containers in the room, i.e. snuff boxes, 35mm film containers
- Make sure that you leave things as undisturbed as possible. If your child knows you are searching she/he will hide things even better.
- When you are in her/his room at other times, take a few minutes to look beyond where you normally would look, (e.g. when putting laundry away, look in the back of the drawer or underneath clothing usually not worn.) Look for signs of something out of the ordinary
- Look in other places of your home (e.g. out of season clothing, backpack, family room in basement, car, garage). Also, check places close to where the teen comes and goes (front closet, laundry room).
- Drug paraphernalia is as revealing as finding actual drugs. You can tell what kinds of drugs a teen is using by the paraphernalia found. Look for the following items: rolling papers, piping/tubing of any kind, metal screens, roach clips, Visine, used foil, small thin metal cigarette (one-hitter), any sort of pipe or pipe device (e.g. metal, glass, wood, paper), and small containers used to store pot (chew containers, baggies, 35mm film containers). These containers may have brown powder or seeds in them.
- Conduct repeated room searches over a period of time. Teens can be using for periods without actually possessing the chemicals

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What to do if you find something:

If you find something, you have two choices:

1. To put back what you found and monitor it for a few weeks. You can learn data about your teen's pattern of use by what happens to their stash. This data will be helpful for a later intervention
2. To confront your teen with the discovery and initiate some form of intervention. In this confrontation, a parent can tell something was found and not tell them specifically what it was or how it was found. Don't let them put you on the defensive. Make them do the work of explaining.

Possible resources to assist in the confrontation/intervention:

- chemical health coordinator in your local school district
- police
- a therapist independent of the school district
- your employee assistance program
- clergy or youth minister
- extended family member who has been in recovery or has a strong connection with your teen

Typical forms of defensiveness:

- **DENIAL** – where your child outright lies to you even if there is overwhelming evidence to suggest you have “the goods” on them. Denial is a way to shut out the truth and protect their “using” lifestyle.
- **MINIMIZING** – where your child makes the issue out to be nothing/not a big deal. Your teen will make you feel as if you are over-reaching, i.e. “I only did it once, it was just a little bit, all the kids have tried it, **you** are out of touch.”
- **RATIONALIZING** – where your child excuses for their behavior. Their “logic” may make sense to no one else, but they have justified their choices. This is where parents feel like their child makes no sense to them and can not talk “rationally” anymore.

Beware of threats and bargains:

When teens run out of options they will often resort to desperate measures. They may threaten to run away, hurt themselves, never let you see them again, or some other threats that push your buttons of fear/loss. Other teens promise you they will become angelic or change in some global fashion. Both of these behaviors often are ploys in avoiding taking responsibility for the issues/problems that underpin why and how they are in trouble.

Getting help:

Many times parents by this point are feeling guilty or shameful for having “failed.” Some parents are very angry and feeling estranged from their teen. This is not a time to isolate or go into denial yourself. It is time to access good information, get support for yourself, and engage in a process that can get to the bottom of what is impacting your teen/family.

If we can be of help in providing you with a chemical health assessment or providing you with other community resources, please feel free to give Elaine Johnson, Intervention Resources Coordinator, a call at 612-798-7373 Ext. 32 or fax Elaine at 612-243-3615.