

## **SCREENING GUIDELINE**

Adolescent drug users/abusers do not usually seek help by themselves. Instead, they are often referred by their significant others who may have observed some symptoms/signs already. Warning signs of drug use/abuse are detectable by parents/close family members at home, by teachers at school, or by peers/classmates at school or at leisure. Such warning signs are an indication that the client may be at high risks of drug use/abuse, delinquent behaviour, or other problems.

When the client's significant others do observe a number of such signs, it means that the client warrants further assessment by professionals. If assessment or intervention can be conducted earlier, there would be greater chance of success, as well as reduced detrimental impact on the individual, family or society.

Below are some warning signs of adolescent drug use/abuse that can be detected by social workers and/or parents, teachers, and peers respectively.

	Parents	Teachers	Peers
<b><u>Behaviour Patterns</u></b>			
✧ Late for home, staying outside for exceptionally long period, run away from home	*		
✧ Staying in own room, isolating from family members, secretive behaviour	*		
✧ At odds with family	*		*
✧ No appetite, sudden physical changes, losing/ gaining weight within a short period of time	*		*
✧ Personal hygiene pattern changed	*	*	*
✧ Antisocial behavior	*	*	*
<b><u>Emotional and Psychological State</u></b>			
✧ Emotionally unstable, aggressive, agitated, or depressed	*	*	*
✧ Always put the blame on others	*	*	*
✧ Marked changes in psychological state (easily nervous, restless)	*	*	*
<b><u>Family systems</u></b>			
✧ Abrupt changes in family functioning	*		

	Parents	Teachers	Peers
<u>School/Work</u>			
✧ Abrupt changes in school functioning, e.g. falling school grade or conduct, missing classes or school days		*	*
✧ Low concentration in class and in study		*	*
✧ Bring a lot of money to school/work place		*	*
✧ Asking money from classmates			*
✧ Absent from work without reason, late/leave early			*
<u>Leisure and Recreation</u>			
✧ Abrupt changes in hobbies or interests	*	*	*
✧ No interests, or inert	*	*	*
✧ Secretive communication with friends	*		*
✧ Unexplained cash, new items or clothing	*		*
✧ Always asking for money, or even stealing money/ items from home/friends	*		*
✧ Going to some high-risks spots, e.g. disco, rave parties, or games centres	*		*
<u>Presence of signs of drug use</u>			
✧ Strange equipment: pills, medicine bottle, needle, tin foil, spoons, straw	*	*	*
✧ Wear sun-glasses inappropriately to hide dilated or constricted pupil	*	*	*
✧ Wear long sleeves inappropriately to hide needle mark	*	*	*
✧ Strange smell from body, always scratch oneself	*	*	*
✧ Serious decayed teeth	*	*	*

In order to have a better understanding of the nature or scope of the presenting problems, social workers may attempt to make a quick enquiry from the client, as well as parents, teachers, or peers, whenever possible.

The aim of this screening interview is to get brief information on any notable problems (including drug use/abuse) as reported by the informant. Hence, social workers may quickly investigate the following 10 domains (Note 1) by briefly asking:

Are you aware of/have you noticed any problems on your/the client's...?

1. Drug use/abuse \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
*(e.g., signs of drug use, patterns of use, reasons for use)*
2. Behaviour patterns \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
*(e.g., deviant behaviour, involvement in crimes)*
3. Health status \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
*(e.g., major illness, recent physical health problems)*
4. Emotional and psychological state \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
*(e.g., depression, suicidal ideation or attempts)*
5. Family system \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
*(e.g., family substance use, family chaos)*
6. School adjustment \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
*(e.g., falling school grade, truancy)*
7. Work \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
*(e.g., idle, frequent absence from work without reason)*
8. Social skills \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
*(e.g., poor communication skills, withdrawn)*
9. Peer relationship \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
*(e.g., substance using peers)*
10. Leisure/recreation \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
*(e.g., rave parties)*

Note 1: The 10 domains are modified from Tarter (1990).

**(Reference:  
Annex 2: Risk factors of adolescent drug use/abuse)**