

# WARNING SIGNS FOR SUBSTANCE USE

During COVID-19 Related School Closure

Prepared by  
Student Assistance  
Services  
Corporation  
660 White Plains  
Road, Tarrytown,  
NY 10591

When school buildings were open, we knew that no student was immune to the risk of substance use and it was easier to identify students who were using. Worrying about the health of family members, job loss and economic stress, the loss of a loved one, adapting to distance learning, reduced contact with coaches, peers and extended family, boredom, disappointment over canceled celebrations and other activities, and increased exposure to parent and other family members' use of alcohol and other drugs, which are all too common during COVID-19, may increase a student's use of substances. While school buildings are closed, all who have contact with students, including parents and caregivers, have an important role in identifying who may be involved in substance use.

*The presence of any of these signs does not necessarily indicate a problem with alcohol or other drugs, but it might be the first sign that a problem may be occurring that warrants further attention. Remember you may be the first person to suspect a problem and prevent a trajectory of increased substance use and resulting serious consequences for the student.*

## THE FOLLOWING IS A LIST OF WARNING SIGNS OF POSSIBLE STUDENT SUBSTANCE USE OR OTHER ISSUES THAT WARRANT ATTENTION:

### ACADEMICS

- Lack of participation in virtual classes
- Submitting assignments late, inconsistently, or not at all
- Not responding to outreach from teachers or other school staff
- Trouble focusing on school work
- Decline in quality of work
- Writing about substance use

### BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES

- Changes in sleeping patterns (not sleeping, sleeping all the time, sleeping during the day and up all night)
- Dramatic change in behavior- suddenly irritable, belligerent, withdrawn, or defiant
- Excess activity; restlessness
- Sneaking out at night
- Change in mood without a reason
- General defensiveness
- Lack of interest in pleasurable activities
- Lack of motivation
- Coughing
- Missed appointments & meetings
- Excessive forgetting
- Repeated vomiting

### APPEARANCE

- Redness around the nose and mouth
- Neglect of appearance (poor hygiene)
- Sweet, burnt odor on student
- Dilated or constricted pupils, red or glassy eyes, frequent use of eye drops
- Marked change in weight or appetite
- Burns on hands or clothing
- Drug paraphernalia observed (vaping device, rolling papers)