

Buying Drugs Online: What Parents Need To Know



Where do teens get drugs? Twenty years ago, the answer to this question would have been from classmates at school, from friends at a party, or from a medicine cabinet. Today, many young people purchase drugs online. They are exposed to offers for drugs through different social media apps. Popular apps include Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, Tumblr, and Twitch. Many of these apps are free to download from app stores.

How Do Teens Buy Drugs Online?

Drug traffickers market illegal drugs and counterfeit pills using emojis, and adolescents request and buy drugs using these pictograms. Emojis on their own are not indicative of substance use. Parents and caregivers should consider whether or not they have witnessed changes in their teen's behavior, appearance, eating and sleeping habits, friends, interests, and mood that are often synonymous with substance use. Such changes would be reason to have a conversation about possible drug use.

How Can Parents And Caregivers Keep Teens Safe?

The most important thing that parents and caregivers can do is to maintain a good relationship with their children, while educating themselves about substance use. Here are a few ways parents and caregivers can protect their teens and prevent them from purchasing drugs online:

- **Keep the communication lines open.** Parents should create an open line of communication with their teens and engage them in conversation about their friends, what is happening in their school, their interests, and more. Building close relationships with their adolescents can help parents notice changes in their behavior that could point to substance use.
- **Make sure they know the consequences.** Since drugs can be so readily available online, teens may think that they aren't really that harmful. However, drug traffickers are known to lace pills with other substances (like fentanyl) that will increase the drug's potency and make its consumption even more dangerous. In addition to a possible overdose, buying and using drugs can lead to other consequences. There have been cases where someone has been sentenced to prison for giving a pill to someone who later overdosed.
- **Check out their "searches" (if drug use is suspected).** Parents can look through their teens' browsers or Google searches on their computers or cell phones. They should keep an eye out for any "How to buy ___ online" -type searches and ask questions about anything that causes strong suspicion. This may be an uncomfortable conversation and parents may be accused of spying. Parents can respond by letting their teens know that they are worried and only want to keep them safe.
- **Monitor their delivered packages (if drug use is suspected).** Drugs are often delivered in unmarked and discreet packages. If parents find their adolescents getting mail or packages that they don't expect, they should ask them about it. Parents may want to be present when their teens opens packages.



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