As you get older, you may find that more of your peers are trying alcohol and other drugs. Even though the dangers of alcohol and other drug use are well known, about half of high school students admit to using alcohol in the past month, and one third report binge drinking (more than 5 drinks in one sitting).

More than one third of high school students reported smoking cigarettes within the past month. A smaller number of young people admit to using illegal drugs, such as marijuana (“pot”, “grass”) and cocaine. Today, we are seeing more problems in young people related to use of “designer” drugs such as Ecstasy.

Serious problems also happen when young people use substances (like airplane glue) that are meant for other uses, or if they take someone else’s medication.

Young people who use alcohol and other drugs often have other mental health problems (such as depression, anxiety, ADHD). Young people sometimes use substances to try to help them with symptoms of the other mental health problem. This is very risky.

You know that you or a friends may be having a problem if you or they start “hanging out” with peers who use alcohol or other drugs, have a drop in grades, or start getting into trouble due to drug or alcohol use (arrests, suspensions, etc). Any young person who beings to lose control over her or his drinking or drug use is headed for problems. Young people who begin to go out of their way to get and use drugs or alcohol, or continue to use even after there have been problems, has a substance abuse issue.

Young people who are most at risk for alcohol and other drug use may also have problems with:

- Family conflict
- Physical or sexual abuse
- Lack of other activities
- Poor coping skills
- Poor self-esteem
- Depression

Some young people are also worried about the alcohol or other drug use of a family member, possibly a parent.
Help is Available.

If you are stressed about something or worried that you may have a problem with alcohol or drugs, talk to someone you trust (e.g., your parent, doctor or nurse practitioner, or someone at school).

Don’t turn to alcohol or drugs as an answer to your problems; they will just make things worse.

The following Web sites might also be helpful: www.family.samhsa.gov and www.monitoringthefuture.org.