

# ADOLESCENCE

## *Strategies to prevent teenage* **SUBSTANCE ABUSE**

**Addictive substance initiation has dangerous health implications for teenage children as it coincides with critical developmental milestones**



**A**dolescents, poised at the crossroads of childhood and adulthood, are increasingly becoming vulnerable to substance abuse. While traditional addictive substances such as alcohol and tobacco continue to be widely available and used, a new adversary has emerged: vaping. Although banned by the Central and state governments in 2019, vapes aka e-cigarettes are being marketed as a safer alternative to tobacco and have a significant user base among teenage children.

A 2023 survey by the Delhi-based Think Change Forum found that 96 percent of Indian teens aged 14-17 were unaware that vapes are banned countrywide, and 89 percent are oblivious of their harmful effects. Sleek



**Reena Chopra**

design, nicotine flavored options, and aggressive marketing strategies have made vapes an attractive option for teens, with potential dangers carefully masked. This early addictive substance initiation has dangerous health implications for children as it coincides with critical developmental milestones.

**Reena Chopra**, a Bhubaneswar-based child psychologist and founder of SAA-RHOLISTICWELLNESS a firm that propagates mindful parenting, spoke to *PW's* **Kiran Balimane** about common causes of substance abuse and how parents can protect their children from them.

“During adolescence, children undergo several physical and emotional changes that make them particularly vulnerable to substance abuse,” says Chopra. Some com-

## Substance abuse trends among Indian adolescents (2019–2023)

Year	Tobacco use (%)	Alcohol use (%)	Vaping awareness (%)
2019	28.6	11.0	10
2020	27.5	10.5	15
2021	26.0	9.8	20
2022	24.5	9.0	25
2023	23.0	8.5	30

Source: National Family Health Survey and Think Change Forum

mon triggers are:

**Peer pressure.** Adolescence is a period marked by heightened desire for social acceptance. The fear of ostracization can drive teenagers to mimic peer behaviour, including substance abuse. Allure of being part of the ‘in-crowd’ often outweighs the perceived risks associated with smoking, drugs and alcohol.

**Emotional turmoil.** The teenage years are a period of emotional upheavals — academic and social pressures, familial conflicts, and identity crises. In the absence of healthy coping mechanisms, teenagers find comfort in addictive substances. But they offer only temporary respite.

**Curiosity and experimentation thrill.** The adolescent brain is wired for exploration. The novelty of doing something forbidden and risky is enticing. Unfortunately, this curiosity, when directed towards drugs/alcohol, which begins with experimentation, can eventually lead to dependency.

### PARENTAL INTERVENTIONS

Parents play a vital role in preventing their children from falling into the deadly trap of harmful addictions. Here’s

how they can make a difference:

**Open communication.** Build a home environment where children feel safe discussing their challenges and curiosities without fear of judgment.

**Educate, don’t preach.** Provide factual information about the risks associated with excessive use of addictive substances, including vaping, highlighting long-term danger to health and well-being.

**Lead by example.** Children emulate parental behaviour. Set a positive precedent by demonstrating and modeling healthy coping mechanisms and abstinence.

**Monitor and engage.** Remain well-informed about your child’s social circle and activities. Encourage participation in constructive hobbies and interests.

**Seek professional help.** If signs of regular substance abuse manifest, promptly consult with child psychologists or counselors to address the problem quickly.

“With informed guidance, open communication, and proactive interventions, parents can steer their children towards a future free from the shadows of addiction,” says Chopra.

