

## Vulnerability to Addiction

Teens may be more vulnerable to alcohol, tobacco, and other drug addiction because of the way their brains develop. A Yale University study of published brain research determined that during the teen years, brains change in the way they respond to experiences. At the same time, young people are in a highly transitional state – motivated to become an adult and do adult things. For example, says R. Andrews Chambers, the study’s author, “Instead of playing with toy cars, they go out and drive a car.” In other words, teens’ brains are motivating them to acquire skills and interests that will help them become adults and function in the adult world. Teens are wide open to the enticements of new experiences. This includes experimenting with substances.

This is where trouble begins – alcohol, tobacco and other drugs interfere with experimentation with more rewarding, positive activities. When addicted, a teen’s main motivation is to buy and use drugs. It’s hard to learn how to balance a checkbook or buy car insurance when all that’s on a kid’s mind is how to get another dose of his/her drug of choice.

The best way to protect young persons’ brain power is to get help for them as soon as you suspect they’re using alcohol, tobacco or other substances. Contact your school’s counselor for helpful resources.