

## **Definition and Goal of Debate**

Underage substance abuse can be defined as a health condition in which adolescents excessively use drugs or alcohol in unhealthy ways. This can include addiction, using substances in ways that interfere with normal life, and doing dangerous things because of the substance. It can be detrimental to both the child and society. For those underage, illicit substance use and abuse becomes part of the landscape of their teenage years. Drug and alcohol use in adolescence is a very risky proposition. So many people are unaware of the countless harmful long-term effects in store for a child who abuses illegal substances and the impacts on other individuals, families, and society. We must take action to put an end to this severe problem of underage substance abuse. The international goal is to find adequate ways in which we can eliminate illicit substance consumption amongst children. What steps can your country take to reduce the number of adolescents taking drugs and drinking alcohol? How can we raise awareness on this issue to encourage sufficient change worldwide?

## **Causes**

Peer pressure stands as being the driving force for altering certain behaviours amongst adolescents and has a major influence on decision making and habits. Many children start doing drugs or drinking alcohol due to direct or indirect pressure they feel from peers who are using illegal substances and uncomfortably encouraging them to do the same. Similarly, adolescents who witness their parents and other adults drinking alcohol, smoking, taking drugs etc, may believe that substance use is a normal experience in daily lives. Social media also has a significant influence on substance use within young people because the distress it causes can lead them to cope with drugs or alcohol. The internet is laden with images and messages of substance use and thus social media may deliver more posts that involve drugs and alcohol. Different accounts may glorify binge drinking and partying or display content that idolises celebrities that use drugs which strongly influences adolescents to do the same. Additionally, youthful curiosity is a major determining factor that drives the behaviour of those who consume illegal substances at an early age. Curiosity increases the thought process of a child at critical moments in their life which therefore prompts their experimentation with substance use. Furthermore, those struggling with mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, ADHD, may choose to drink alcohol or take drugs as an escape from these problems. If teenagers are unhappy and cannot find a healthy outlet for their feelings and frustrations, they may turn to substances for relief. Depending on which they try, they may feel more at ease or energized and confident and consequently begin to abuse these substances more frequently.

## **Impacts**

Young people who persistently abuse substances often experience an array of problems, including academic difficulties, physical and mental health problems, poor relationships with others, or potential involvement with criminal investigations. There is a global estimation of 150 million young people who use tobacco, one in every 10 girls aged 13-15 years and one in every 5 boys aged 13-15 years. Exposure to nicotine at such young ages can have lasting effects on adolescent brain development. It also increases the likelihood of serious health problems like cancer and heart disease and affects physical active pursuits. Underage drinking is when a child or teen drinks under the legal drinking limit. Over 33% of children and teenagers worldwide have admitted to having or consuming alcohol at least once before the age of 15. The rate of current alcohol consumption increases with increasing age. Almost 1% of 12-13 year olds confess to drinking alcohol on a regular basis, 17% at ages 16-17 and 32% among 18-20 year olds. Alcohol abuse is a primary cause of injuries, violence, and premature deaths. Underage drinking causes 4,300 deaths each year. Worldwide, 1 in 8 children admit to using an illegal drug regularly. There are many negative consequences that drugs can bring to a young person's life. Underage drug use can cause emotional problems (depression, schizophrenia, etc), behavioural problems (e.g. engaging in violence), addiction (dependent on a substance), physical health problems (diseases, damage to the brain and nervous system, etc) and learning problems (effects on short and long-term memory). If we do not shortly make successful and sufficient progress to see changes in the reduction of those underage abusing illicit substances, we will continue to witness these long-term effects on adolescents and the serious impacts on the rest of society.

These effects are serious and need appropriate and sufficient action to be taken to solve the issue of underage substance abuse.