

TEMPERAMENT CAN HELP YOUR TEEN STAY DRUG & ALCOHOL FREE



Teenagers, almost by definition, are risk takers. Some teens will take small risks (e.g., try a new food, ask someone out on a date, or cheat on a test); some teens will take medium risks (e.g., try out for a school play, stay out past curfew, or shoplifting); and, some teens will take major risks (e.g., learn how to fly a plane, engage in unprotected sex, or experiment with drugs or alcohol). What differentiates these teenaged risk takers? It is their temperament! **Temperament is primarily that aspect of our personality concerned with emotions and the speed and intensity of our reactions to them.**

We are born with four temperaments and typically develop our “dominant” temperament—those behaviors, attitudes and emotions that feel MOST comfortable to us. Our “shadow” temperament—those behaviors, attitudes and emotions that feel LEAST comfortable to us, is typically not developed—and, in fact it is often avoided. Yet all four are within us and are equally essential to survival:



EARTH—reliable, traditional, organized, sensible, and trustworthy



AIR—intelligent, analytical, curious, visionary, and logical



FIRE—spontaneous, playful, innovative, uninhibited, and fearless



WATER—compassionate, friendly, personal, and benevolent

How do the four Basic Elements© of temperament relate to teen use of drugs and alcohol? *We posit that the dominant temperament of a teenager is a strong influence on his/her willingness—or unwillingness—to take risks!*

For example, a teen with an *Earth* temperament may be unwilling to take risks associated with drug use because they are illegal, but may indeed try alcohol because it will soon be legal for them—at least within a few years. A teen with an *Air* temperament may seriously question the logic of laws that inhibit his/her ability to use alcohol simply because of age. They may use drugs or alcohol just to demonstrate to themselves (or others) the inanity of such laws.

The *Fire* teen may be tempted to use drugs or alcohol just because it might be fun to do so. At a party with other teens where drugs and alcohol are present, they typically want to be perceived as “one of the guys” and unafraid of any consequence by willingly imbibing. A *Water* teen may be



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unwilling to use drugs or alcohol in front of others, because they do not want to embarrass or get them into trouble with parents or authorities. However, they may willingly do so in the privacy of their home or choose to deal with their stressors through overeating or becoming a “chocoholic” —both dysfunctional behaviors but totally legal.

Temperament won’t cause someone to take drugs or drink alcohol or overeat but may shed some light on some of the reasons that many teenagers do so. If you are the parent of a teen, can you identify your son or daughter’s dominant temperament? Have you seen evidence of these temperaments in the risks they are willing to take?

Jim Harden and Brad Dude are the co-authors of, *"What Makes You Tick and What Ticks You Off –How the Basic Elements of Temperament Will Lead You to a Happier Life."* They conduct temperament workshops across the US. To learn more about temperament or purchase a copy of our their book, visit their blog and website at (www.whatmakesyoutickandwhatticksyouoff.com).

