

- Behavior patterns, such as nail biting, thumb sucking, pica (habitual ingestion of nonfood substances), rituals (“security” blanket or toy), and unusual movements (head banging, rocking, overt masturbation, walking on toes)
- Activities of daily living, such as hours of sleep and arising, duration of nighttime sleep and naps, type and duration of exercise, regularity of stools and urination, age of toilet training, and daytime or nighttime bedwetting
- Unusual disposition; response to frustration
- Use or abuse of alcohol, drugs, coffee, or tobacco

One of the most common concerns relates to sleep. Many children develop a normal sleep pattern, and all that is required during the assessment is a general overview of nighttime sleep and nap schedules. However, a number of children develop sleep problems (see Sleep Problems, [Chapters 10](#) and [13](#)). When sleep problems occur, the nurse needs a more detailed sleep history to guide appropriate interventions.

Habits related to use of chemicals apply primarily to older children and adolescents. If a youngster admits to smoking, drinking, or using drugs, ask about the quantity and frequency. Questions such as “Many kids your age are experimenting with drugs and alcohol; have you ever had any drugs or alcohol?” may give more reliable data than questions such as “How much do you drink?” or “How often do you drink or take drugs?” Clarify that “drinking” includes all types of alcohol, including beer and wine. When quantities such as a “glass” of wine or a “can” of beer are given, ask about the size of the container.

If older children deny use of chemical substances, inquire about past experimentation. Asking, “You mean you never tried to smoke or drink?” implies that the nurse expects some such activity, and the youngster may be more inclined to answer truthfully. Be aware of the confidential nature of such questioning, the adverse effect that the parents' presence may have on the adolescent's willingness to answer, and the fact that self-reporting may not be an accurate account of chemical abuse.