

Substance Abuse



Substance abuse is the use of any substance to the extent that it causes physical, mental or emotional damage – either temporary or permanent. Abused substances can be legal or illegal. For example, individuals may abuse substances as varied as alcohol, over-the-counter medications, household chemicals, prescription drugs, marijuana or other illegal drugs.

By definition, alcoholism and drug addiction are diseases based on compulsive, obsessive and dependent behaviors that take priority over all other human needs. Alcohol and other drugs not only become more important than family, friends and career, but more important than the most basic needs for food, clothing and shelter. Substance abuse is directly related to many violent crimes. It is no surprise that alcohol and other drug abuse can devastate family life and the lives of our children in particular. Many children suffer the shattering of their self-esteem and sense of security when raised in families where alcohol and other substance abuse is present.

Adults, as well as children, abuse drugs for one reason – freedom. They are searching for freedom from insecurities, fear, rules, problems, pain, and boredom. Unfortunately, what they become are slaves – slaves to something so powerful that it cannot be controlled.

Stages of Addiction

- 1 The drug produces a short-term, intensely pleasant and artificial sense of well-being in the user.
- 2 A craving develops for the drug and the user desires to repeat the pleasant and artificial sense of well-being.
- 3 As drug use continues, more and more of the drug is needed to produce the desired effect – tolerance for the drug is developed.
- 4 The central nervous system adapts to the continuing drug use and becomes dependent on the drug for normal function. (A user can become drug dependent the first time a drug is used.)
- 5 Using the drug becomes more important than family, friends, and career. Even the most basic needs for food, clothing and shelter are no longer important to the user.
- 6 When drug use stops, the user becomes sick and has withdrawal symptoms.

What Can I Do To Help My Children Be Drug Free?

According to the White House's Office of National Drug Control Policy strategy update released February 2005, parents are the most important role models in children's lives. When a child decides whether or not to use alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, a crucial consideration is, "What will my parents think?" Children who decide not to use alcohol or other drugs often make this decision because they have strong convictions against the use of these substances based on a "family" value system. Make your family's values clear by explaining why you choose a particular course of action and how that choice reflects your values.

State your position clearly when it comes to dangerous substances like alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs. Tell your children that you forbid them to use alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs because you love them. Make it clear that this rule holds true even at other people's houses.

Discuss the consequences of breaking the rules—what the punishment will be and how it will be carried out. Children want you to show you care enough to lay down the law and to go to the trouble of enforcing it. Let your children know how happy you are that they respect the rules of the household. Emphasize the things your children do right, instead of focusing on what's wrong.

Schedule regular parent-child rituals and family meetings. Rituals, like having meals together at least once or twice a week, playing games, going to the library or to get ice cream together once a week, can be opportunities to help the family catch up and establish better and more open communication.

Take advantage of everyday "teachable moments." When you see a group of teenagers drinking and hanging out, or an anti-drug commercial on TV talk about the negative effects of drinking alcohol or taking drugs. Ask them what they think.

- Listen to what they are saying and make eye contact.
- Find out how their day was, what happened in school or with their friends.
- Go to their events, i.e., sports games, plays, school shows.
- Play games with them.
- Know who their friends are.
- Know where your children are.
- Set clear expectations for their behavior.
- Be consistent in your training and discipline.
- Give them lots of encouragement.
- Ask them for their opinions.
- When they do well, praise them.
- Talk to them about the dangers of substance use and abuse!

Is My Child Using Drugs?

- Withdrawn, tired, and careless about personal grooming
- Hostile and uncooperative; frequently breaks curfews
- Verbally or physically abusive
- Relationships deteriorate
- New group of friends

- Lies about activities
- Grades and school attendance slip
- Reduced memory or attention span
- Loses interest in favorite activities
- Extreme weight loss or gain
- Eating and sleeping patterns change
- Rebellious, overreacts to criticism
- Cheats, steals, always needs money, or has large sums of money
- Eyes are red-rimmed and/or nose is runny but has no cold

If you think your child may be in trouble, seek professional help!!

Support Groups

Alcoholics Anonymous World Services
www.aa.org

Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters
www.al-anon-alateen.org

Toughlove International
www.toughlove.org

Narcotics Anonymous
www.wsoinc.com

Federal Resources

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) www.nida.nih.gov

Nat'l Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Info www.health.org

Center for Substance Abuse Prevention
(301) 443-0365

Center for Substance Abuse Treatment
(800) 662-HELP