



My teen is using drugs and alcohol. What can I do?

- 1) Stay calm. This is the most important (and possibly hardest) thing to do. Your reactions can be the biggest factor in determining if your teenager successfully recovers.
- 2) Confront the issue. Addiction is progressive, and ALWAYS gets worse. Ignoring the problem will not make it go away. It may be experimentation, but it can develop into a problem. Using to cope is never healthy.
- 3) Part of addictive behavior is lying about it. Though it is important to have a conversation with your teen about their use and your values around drugs and alcohol, don't take your teenagers word for it. Don't listen to their promises, pleading or threats.
- 4) Set boundaries with your teen and do not give in. For instance, if you take away the car for a week, you have to be willing to drive them around and not make exceptions. Make consequences uncomfortable, but not unbearable (for you or them). Taking away things that matter from them for up to 7 days is uncomfortable, but also realistic for the both of you. They will see that they can earn things back if they follow the rules. Cell phones, car privileges, favorite pair of jeans/shoes, make-up, and nail polish can be effective consequences for some teens.
- 5) Learn about the disease of addiction and the drugs(s) that your teen is using. The more you learn, the more you'll understand what is helpful and what is hurting your teen in their recovery.
- 6) Seek support. Addiction is bigger than your family and should not be a family secret. Getting help from professionals and support groups can help you, your family, and your teen in their recovery. Recovery programs for your teen should address addiction at multiple levels (i.e. family, mental health, medical, etc.). The program should also offer services that are developmentally appropriate to your teen as adult treatment needs are often different.
- 7) Stay positive and patient with your teen and yourself. Addiction affects the whole family and can take its toll. Making sure you take care of yourself by engaging in self-care practices is okay. If you feel anxious, depressed, or feel like you may have an addiction yourself, find help and support for yourself through a professional. You need to be at your healthiest in order to help your teen be their healthiest.

By staying diligent, educating yourself, and seeking interventions and treatment, the progression of addiction can be stopped. Your teen can go on to live a productive, healthy, and happy life.