

Dealing with a Drug Problem in the Family

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What are the facts about illegal drugs?

- Illegal drug use is a growing problem in all communities
- Drugs such as heroin, cocaine (crack), and crystal methamphetamine are increasingly available on the street
- People of all ages, cultures and backgrounds are using, and abusing drugs
- Use of illegal drugs can lead to chronic poor health, life-threatening diseases, and death.

What is drug addiction?

Over time, continued drug use can result in addiction. Addiction includes both physical and mental dependency on drugs. Doctors consider drug addiction a disease.

What are the health risks of drug addiction?

Illegal drugs such as heroin, cocaine (crack), and crystal methamphetamine affect the way a person thinks, feels and behaves. Mixing illegal drugs with other substances such as alcohol, sedatives or painkillers can cause serious side effects. Drug use impairs judgment and may lead to behaviours that increase the risk of contracting infections such as HIV (the virus that leads to AIDS) and Hepatitis C. These viruses can be transmitted when the blood of an infected person enters the bloodstream if another person. Sharing needles, spoons, water, filters, ties, mouthpieces or

containers used to mix drugs carries a high risk of such transmission. Infected semen and vaginal fluids can also spread the HIV virus and not using protection (such as condoms) for sex increases the risk of possible transmission.

How can you tell if someone in your family is using illegal drugs?

Someone using drugs MAY NOT display any signs or symptoms. Although it is impossible to always tell if someone is using drugs, the following signs and symptoms MAY indicate a possible drug addiction:

Health Symptoms

- Lack of appetite
- Severe weight loss
- Unexplained health problems - e.g. constant sniffles and flu-like symptoms.
- Rashes and sores on the face

Changes in behaviour

- Lack of interest in usual activities
- Drastic mood changes, unusual outbursts of bad temper
- More secretive, keeping irregular hours
- Loss of interest in appearance and hygiene
- Lying

Other signs

- Unexplained financial problems – e.g. Unpaid debts and bills, borrowing money, selling personal possessions

- Stealing

Is it possible to recover from drug addiction?

Yes, people can and do recover from drug addiction. Recovery from drug addiction means getting over both physical and mental dependency on drugs. There are three important things to understand about the recovery process.

1. Recovery is a long-term process

The road to recovery begins when a drug addict wants to quit and believes he/she can quit. It does not happen overnight.

2. Recovery is not straightforward

Relapse may occur along the way and does not mean failure. Many people have to make several attempts at quitting before being successful. Do not lose patience; this is part of the process.

3. Recovery requires support

Your family can provide crucial help and encouragement throughout the recovery process.

What are the steps in recovery?

1. Recovery from physical dependency

Getting rid of drugs from the body – often referred to as 'detox' – can cause withdrawal symptoms such as fevers, vomiting, diarrhea and sometimes convulsions. There are residential detox centers that provide support in going through withdrawal. Acupuncture treatment can also be helpful.

2. Recovery from mental dependency

The intense cravings for drugs will come and go for a long time after 'detox' and





having support is vital. This can include:

- Counseling: one-to-one counseling with a drug counselor
- Treatment programs: short-term residential stay from 1-3 months after 'detox' for those who do not have a stable or supportive home life.
- Group therapy: groups that are run by professionals and may be part of a residential or non-residential program.
- Self-help support groups: groups which are run by recovering addicts who help each other keep off drugs.
- Encouragement and support from family and friends.

3. Additional lifestyle changes

Recovering drug addicts will need to develop alternative activities that are positive and healthy to maintain a drug free life. What helps will depend on individual interest and needs.

Useful activities can include:

- Recreational activities
- Volunteer work
- Going back to school
- Life skills training
- Getting a job
- For immigrants, improving English language skills will help extend their options.

4. Methadone program

Some heroin addicts may choose a methadone program, which is prescribed and monitored by a doctor. Methadone is a substitute for heroin and is also addictive. However, this program can give the drug addict a break from the cycle of buying and using illegal drugs, and a chance to consider making longer term changes.

How can family members help?

There are lots of ways family members can help drug addicts. However some of the ways we think might help actually make it harder for a drug addict to admit they have a problem and/or seek help.

Here are some things that may be helpful:

- Let them know you care
- Be clear that they have to take responsibility for their actions
- Recognize that you and your family cannot solve their problems
- Encourage behaviour and activities that can help them reduce their health risks, cut down, or quit.
- Recognize that you and your family may also need support because of this disease in your family.
- Seek help and advice from a professional such as a drug counsellor or community organizations.

Here are some things that will NOT help:

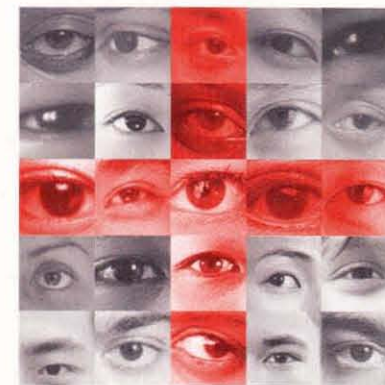
- Many drug addicts feel badly about themselves even if they don't show it. Taking drugs is often a way to escape from feeling bad. Shaming, scolding, lecturing or telling them that they are worthless or bad will make them feel worse.
- Pressure them into giving up drugs. Quitting will only work if they want to do it for themselves.
- Pretending that it isn't happening will not make the problem go away.
- Making excuses or putting up with unacceptable behaviour.
- Giving or lending them money – it will only be used to buy more drugs.
- Don't be too trusting. Many drug addicts are skilled at knowing how to get their way

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YOU=THEM

IT ONLY HAPPENS TO THEM. YOU ARE THEM.



A S I A