

Does your teen's drug use leave you feeling like you're losing your sanity?

OTHER TITLES

Create It

Teaching your children to talk about their feelings

How can I help my young child learn to get along with others?

If you're a parent, you're a role model: How to teach your children by example

Nurture It

How can I teach my young child to deal with peer pressure?

Teaching your children the truth about drugs and gambling

How can I help my young child to be more confident?

How to listen actively to your children

Choose It

How can I help my child if my partner is addicted?

Helping your teen work through anger

The truth about popular drugs

How do I know if my teen is using drugs?

How do I talk to my teenager about drugs?

Raves and club drugs: How do I protect my kids?

Get It Back

Helping teens evaluate their drug use

How bad is my teen's drinking or drug use?

Does your teen's drug use leave you feeling like you're losing your sanity?

How to get through to your teen

Intervening when your teen is using drugs

Getting help for your son or daughter who is drinking, using other drugs or gambling

Supporting your son or daughter in recovery

YOUR TEEN IS USING alcohol or other drugs in a way that has you really concerned. You may be scared and worried and you are probably feeling very frustrated, too.

Attempts to talk to your son or daughter might result in arguments and each of you saying things you probably wish you hadn't said. It can seem like no matter what you try, it's not the right thing. Sometimes it's like the more you try to help your teen the worse things seem to get. Often, the harder you try to make your teen see the problem, the more they resist.

Support is available

An Alberta Health Services (AHS) addiction counsellor can talk with you about your situation and your concerns about your teen. We are also here for you. Responding to someone else's problem is hard work. When it feels like your life is out of control, we can help you to get it back. We'll teach you how to feel better yourself and we'll also help you to learn some ways of getting through to your son or daughter. There are no quick and easy answers, but we'll help you look at the options and choose the approach that will work best for you. In a sense, when it feels like you have reached the end of your rope, we can help you tie a knot and hang on! You can talk to us on the telephone, visit one of our counsellors, or even attend a program especially for family members.

This brochure will also give you some ideas for things to do on your own.

Some things you can do

If you've been dealing with your teen's alcohol or drug use for a long time, you are probably feeling tired. It's time to take a step back and learn to sort out the things you can do from the things that are not

within your power and control. For example, you can keep talking to your teen, but you can't make them stop using if they don't want to.

That doesn't mean you should give up on your teen. But fight the battles you can win. Learn everything you can about the drugs your kid is using. Learn the truth about alcohol and other drugs—that might take away some of the fear. Not everyone who uses drugs gets hooked. Not everybody who tries drugs continues to use. Learn how to talk to your teen so they will listen. Learn how to listen to your teen so they will continue to talk with you. A counsellor can help by teaching you how to talk to your kids about alcohol and other drug use.

People you can talk to

It's so important to realize that you are not alone! Other parents have been where you are and many, many more are in the same place right now. There is strength in numbers—you can learn from each other.

Support groups like Al-Anon and Nar-Anon have helped thousands of people just like you. They are independent fellowships of men and women who have a common problem and meet to help each other recover from it. Privacy is important to them, too, and participation is anonymous.

Right now, you might be feeling confused and overwhelmed with everything that is going on in your life. When you are ready, take the time to learn about support groups and how they work.

If you are interested in attending a support group, a counsellor can give you more information or you can look up Al-Anon



or Nar-Anon in your telephone book. Call the number listed and a member will tell you all about the group and how to find a meeting in your area.

Your friends and family can also offer support. Keep the lines of communication open. Often, others know more about your situation than you think they know. Friends and family can listen when you need to talk.

Your teen's use can also affect your family

It's likely that your family and even your relationship with your spouse are also being affected by your teen's use. When your teen doesn't come home or comes home drunk or stoned, that behaviour affects your whole family. Or maybe it's the extreme moods that affect everybody else in the house—the blow-ups, angry outbursts or total withdrawal from the family.

Talk to each other about how you are feeling. Suffering in silence just leaves every family member feeling confused and alone.

Start focusing on yourself and your family again. You didn't cause your teen's drinking or drug problem and you can't control it either. Sitting at home worrying is not helping anyone. Start doing the things that you enjoy again. Get out, spend time with friends and take your life back.

When your teen's behaviour affects the health and well-being of other members of the family, you may also want to establish some boundaries about what you are willing to accept from your teen and what you are not. When it comes to making the rules, only you know how much you are willing to put up with. Nobody else can tell you what feels right for you. However, talking with others in similar situations can help. Listening to other ideas helps you to explore options and alternatives for setting rules that you are comfortable with.

Knowing what doesn't work

It's also important to stop doing the things for your son or daughter that help the use to continue. This is called enabling. Some examples of enabling behaviour are covering up for your son or daughter, tolerating their unacceptable behaviour, bailing them out of the troubles they experience or simply ignoring the problem. These things are almost always done with the best of intentions—it's just that they produce the wrong results! When you wonder if what you are about to do is enabling, ask yourself, "Is what I am about to do going to make the situation worse or better?" If it will make it worse, try not to do it.

The following examples will explain enabling but it can take a little time to really understand it. Don't expect yourself to be perfect—when you make a mistake, view it as an opportunity to do it differently next time.

As a parent, it's natural to want to protect and help your children. When they make a mistake, you want to help them put it behind them and move on. When your son or daughter has an alcohol or other drug problem, you might also feel like you want to make excuses for them. Making excuses for your son or daughter just allows the problem to continue. Let them take responsibility for their own actions and answer for their own behaviour.

You might also want to downplay the problem, especially to others. That's pretty usual, too. Most parents don't want to think of their children as being in trouble. Rationalizing or minimizing your teen's drug use isn't helpful either. Saying things like, "He's just a normal teenager," or, "She's no worse off than her friends," is another way of staying stuck for both you and your teen. Do look at things honestly and realistically. If there is a problem, acknowledge it so that you can start dealing with it.

It may even seem important to you to keep the problem private and to deal with it within the family. Covering up the problem just helps it to stay hidden. Talk to your spouse, children, family and others about your teen's problem when you want to.

Giving your teen money might seem like it will make one problem go away. And it might. But it also keeps them from experiencing the consequences of their behaviour. Until they have to face the consequences of their actions, it is hard for them to see the problem. Let them resolve their own money problems.

If you've been providing money with the best of intentions, don't judge yourself too harshly. Now that you know providing money isn't helpful, you can choose whether or not you continue to do it.

It can be so hard to accept that your children have a problem. Sometimes it's just easier to hope the problem will go away on its own or that it will work itself out. But ignoring the problem only helps it to continue. Let your son or daughter know that you are concerned about them. Continue to express how you feel as a result of their actions. For example, you might say, "I feel really worried and concerned when you don't come home at night. I'm scared that something has happened to you."

There is a fine line, sometimes, between enabling and non-enabling behaviour. If your teen calls from a party because they or the person they are with is too loaded to drive, make an exception. Pick them up or make arrangements for them to get home safely. When you ask yourself, "Is what I am about to do going to make the situation worse or better?" you can see that picking up your teen will make it better by removing an even worse risk. So do it.

For more information

We understand that everyone's needs are different. Whether you want to prevent your child from using alcohol, tobacco or other drugs, or you want to help your child deal with a drug problem, we can help. Information and prevention programs, group and family counselling, outpatient and residential treatment, and the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs program are offered by Alberta Health Services and its funded services to help your child and your family.

For more information and to find an addiction services office near you, please call the 24-hour Helpline at 1-866-332-2322.

Activity Page

Treat yourself kindly

Reduce feelings of guilt

Parents often feel very guilty when they set boundaries or reduce enabling behaviour. It can feel like they are not doing all they can for their child. One of the most important things you can do for yourself is to recognize that you can still love and support your kids but not support the drinking or other drug use. Tell your children that you love them. Make it clear that it's their behaviour that you can't support. Let your teens know that you will support them in getting help and encourage them to consider accepting it.

Do the things that make you feel better

You know yourself best. When you feel down and troubled, you are the expert about what helps you to feel better. When you feel tired and overwhelmed, you know what works to refresh you. You have dealt successfully with disappointments and frustrations before. You've learned healthy ways of coping with stress and anxiety. Make a list of all the things that are helpful to you. Then do them.

Take time for yourself

Loving someone with an alcohol or other drug problem can be hard—take time out just for you. Do those healthy things that you enjoy. Go for a walk. Take a hot bath. Read the paper. See a movie.

Keep talking and stay connected

Sometimes when parents feel powerless to change their children, they feel ashamed or embarrassed. As a result, they isolate themselves from others to avoid these feelings. You didn't cause your teen's problem and it's not your fault. It's important to spend time with others and to talk about your feelings. Friends and family can offer a listening ear, support and encouragement. They can also help you to enjoy a much-needed break from the problem.

Become knowledgeable

What you're going through can feel pretty frightening. Knowledge reduces fear by increasing understanding. Read books, watch videos, attend courses. Many AHS offices have libraries full of materials that you can borrow. Remember to learn slowly so that you don't become overwhelmed. The problem didn't happen overnight and it won't resolve that quickly either.

Take good care of yourself

Consider calling a counsellor to learn more about how you are being affected by your teen's use. Awareness is the first step in changing behaviour that is not working for you. Remember you can't control your teen's use but you can control your reaction to it. Taking care of yourself might help you to react more calmly and it will definitely help you feel better.

