



Family Centre Information Package

Parenting an Adolescent with a Substance Use Addiction

It can be a frightening time if you suspect or find out that your adolescent is using drugs and alcohol. Understanding the difference between “use”, “abuse” and “addiction” is important in understanding how big the problem truly is. Abuse can have short-term consequences whereas addiction can have long-term consequences and can be harder to deal with.

WHAT IS ADDICTION?

Addiction is a complex condition. One simple way of describing addictions is the presence of the 4 Cs: Craving, loss of Control of amount or frequency of use, Compulsion to use, and use despite of Consequences.

SIGNS YOUR YOUTH IS STRUGGLING WITH AN ADDICTION

- Lying about where they are
- Change in friendships
- Keeping new friendships at a distance from the parent
- Family connections weakening
- Grades becoming poor
- Skipping class
- Running away
- Change in moods and behaviours
- Behaviours becoming more irritable or volatile
- Finding alcohol or drugs in the youth’s room
- Stealing from friends and family
- Getting in trouble with the law

FEELINGS OR STRUGGLES THE PARENT MAY BE FACING

- The process of confirming the suspicions
- Struggling to set limits and boundaries
- Dealing with consequences of the drug/alcohol use on the family
- Living with blame and shame
- Trying to keep the child safe
- Grieving the loss of the child that was
- Living with guilt
- Choosing self-preservation

WHEN DOES IT BECOME A PROBLEM?

Adolescence is a difficult time, teens are going through a lot of changes physically, emotionally and within peer groups. Adolescence can be a time of experimentation; teens may experiment with alcohol and other substances, but that does not mean they become addicted. Adolescents generally begin to experiment with alcohol and tobacco, progressing to the use of drugs whenever easily available, usually at parties. It becomes a problem when the adolescent no longer uses alcohol or drugs occasionally but begins using daily and continues to use regardless of the negative consequences they endure. The introduction into the drug culture can lead to experimentation and acceptance of other illicit drugs, and for some adolescents, addiction to one or more drugs.



FACTS

- Teens who abuse drugs may have a greater risk of developing an addiction when they are adults.
- Teens who have experimented with drugs or alcohol, it doesn't mean they will automatically become an addict.
- 1 in 5 teens have abused prescription medications, according to the Centers of Disease Control.
- 21% of high school seniors have reported using marijuana in the past month, according to the National Institute of Drug Abuse.
- 1 in 3 parents believe there is little they can do to prevent teen drug use despite evidence that shows parental involvement is the strongest factor in prevention.
- 1 in 5 parents who suspect their teen is using drugs do not intervene to prevent further drug use.
- If proper care and treatment are obtained, recovery is achievable and can be sustained.

FAMILY CENTRE SERVICES

Check out our programs at www.familycentre.ca to see what is available.

You can also leave a message for our Family Connector at (403) 320-4232 ext. 240 if you are interested in parent support or to learn about other resources available in our community.

Family Centre offers the Kin Family Resource Library. Visitors to the library have access to books, videos, DVDs, and magazines that cover a variety of topics. There is no cost for accessing the library; all that is required is a Family Centre library card, which is available at the front desk.

HOW TO HELP YOURSELF

It is important to the parents to initiate conversation with their children before adolescents start using. It is important for parents to have honest, open conversations about drugs and alcohol, this

can include the risks that come with drugs and alcohol. Some of the risks of using drugs and alcohol is becoming involved in more risky behaviours such as unprotected sex, driving while under the influence or driving in a car with someone under the influence, to the more severe risks such as overdosing. Parents are very important and are the biggest protective factor in preventing adolescents from experimenting and becoming addicted to drugs and alcohol and it all starts with having a conversation. Parents need to understand that not every situation will need to use all of these steps in “how to help yourself” as every situation is unique. Parents are encouraged to use only the steps that apply to their situation.

- Just like it is important for parents to initiate the conversation before adolescents start using drugs and alcohol, it is also up to the parents to initiate conversation with their children if they suspect drug or alcohol use. Parents can ask straight-forward questions when said in the right tone. Simply asking, “Have you been using drugs or alcohol?” or “Has anyone offered you drugs recently?” can be enough to get the conversation started.
- If a teen admits to drug or alcohol use, parents responding in the right way is important. Parents who respond in a compassionate and open-minded way during the conversation may be met with less resistance from the child. Overreacting or lashing out can prevent a teen from opening up about their drug or alcohol use and it can make it difficult to find out if this was a one time use or if it is reoccurring and becoming a problem.
- Parents can educate themselves on addiction through websites, books, videos etc.
- Parents need to set limits to the behaviours the parent would like to see and what behaviours they would not like to see. Setting limits can look like having a conversation about what drinking looks like in the home, this conversation can include topics such as: is the teen allowed to drink outside of the home and if so, what does this look like to the parent. Other limits the parent can have a conversation about can include, what is the teens curfew and if the teen is allowed to drink outside of the home, is the teen able to call the parent for a ride home. Parents can also set out the consequences that the teen will face if they do not follow the rules as well as rewards the teen could earn for showing the behaviours the parents want to see. Setting limits and expectations with the teen allows for there to be no miscommunication and allows a discussion to happen. Parents need to remember to involve the teen in setting limits and expectations as the teen will be more likely to follow them if they are apart of the discussion.
- Parents need to practice self-care. This can be a very frightening and exhausting time for parents, and the burnout will happen quickly if self-care is not practiced by the parent for themselves. The parents need for self-care should be a priority. Self-care can look differently for everyone but can include things like going for a 30-minute walk daily, doing grounding exercises daily, taking time to eat 3 proper meals a day, doing a hobby that is enjoyable daily or weekly, sleeping at least 8 hours a night, amongst many other activities.
- If a teen denies drug or alcohol use but the parents suspect otherwise, seeking professional help from your family doctor to complete the drug test along with a complete assessment and treatment plan is for the best as there are mixed reviews on home drug tests. These mixed

reviews include it having little effect on reducing lowering the percentage of adolescents use of drugs and alcohol, home drug tests tend to only test for one set of drugs and there are ways to cheat on home drug tests, and it could damage the relationship between the parent and adolescent. Not every situation calls for a drug test to be taken and it is only needed if the parent suspects that alcohol and drugs have become a major problem in the teens life.

- Seeking professional help can be done at any stage but is encouraged, if you have tried open communication, setting boundaries/limits or if you need help in putting these tools in place. Professional individuals can help parents in finding the right resources for their situation and can be a good support for the parents during this trying time.

RESOURCES

LOCAL RESOURCES

- Lethbridge Youth Treatment Centre
402 6 Ave N, Lethbridge
403 388 7600
- Protection of Children Abusing Drugs Program
Provided by Alberta Health Services
1 888 844 5395
- Addiction Services – Youth Counselling
Melcore Centre
#120A 200 4 Ave S, Lethbridge
403 381 5278
- The Core: Wood’s Homes Emergency Youth Shelter
312 3 St S, Lethbridge
403 317 1777

WEBSITES

- National Institute on Drug Abuse
 - <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/>
- Smart Recovery
 - www.smartrecovery.org/

VIDEO

- Teen Health: Substance Use and Abuse
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6fmhLcYSn-Y>
- Teen Drug Abuse – Don’t miss the signs of Addiction
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZMIGu8u1BM>

BOOKS

- *The Adolescent Relapse Prevention Planner by Jennifer Bruha*: It contains a variety of educational information, discussion topics and exercises around substance abuse that can be used for both individuals and groups.
- *If You Give an Ox and Oxy by Dr. Laura E. Happe PharmaD*: adolescents meet an ox who takes a prescription medication called an opioid. They follow him as he goes from taking a few opioids, to overusing them, and finally becoming addicted, learning about treatment for addiction and how dangerous taking illegal opioid drugs can be.

OTHER

- Youth Addiction Services Centre
1005 17A St NW, Calgary AB
403 297 4664
- Kids Help Phone
1 800 668 6868
- Mental Health Help Line
1 877 303 2642
- Alberta Addiction Hotline
Help find Addiction Services near you
1 866 332 2322

FIRST NATIONS RESOURCES

- Blood Tribe Youth Wellness Centre
In-Patient
P.O. Box 120, Standoff
403 653 1678

REFERENCES

- <https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-illness-and-addiction-index/addiction>
- <https://www.addictioncenter.com/teenage-drug-abuse/>
- <https://drugfree.org/how-to-confront-your-child-about-drug-use-understand-reasons-why-help-them-get-support/>
- <https://drugabuse.com/guide-for-families/parents-of-addicted-children/>
- <https://www.verywellmind.com/parents-warned-about-home-drug-testing-63771>
- Choate, P. W. (2015). Adolescent Alcoholism and Drug Addiction: The Experience of Parents. *Behavioral Sciences (2076-328X)*, 5(4), 461–476. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.uleth.ca/10.3390/bs5040461>