



TIPS FOR PARENTS/CARETAKERS/GUARDIANS OF TEENAGERS OR YOUNG ADULTS WITH SUBSTANCE ABUSE PROBLEMS

Having an adolescent or young adult child who abuses drugs and/or alcohol, can be a nightmare. Not only do parents fear for their health, well-being and future, but their fear may be compounded by feeling completely in the dark about their children's problems. Addiction can happen at any age, but **usually starts** when a person is young, particularly **in their teen years when they begin exploring and experimenting**.

SIGNS TO LOOK OUT FOR

If your child starts **behaving differently for no apparent reason**, such as becoming withdrawn, frequently being tired or depressed or hostile, it could be a sign they are developing a drug-related problem. **Parents may overlook such signs, believing them to be a normal part of adolescence.** Other signs include the following:

- Change of friends
- Untidy appearance
- Decline in school performance
- No longer interested in favourite activities
- Missing classes or school
- Trouble with the law or at school
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits.

THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN DEALING WITH DRUG ABUSE

Parents can play an important role in preventing and dealing with drug abuse. They can do so by **FOSTERING HEALTHY AND RESPONSIBLE ATTITUDES** in their children. This can include **helping children develop decision-making skills** and positive interests by -

- **Teaching their children to avoid doing things in excess** by practicing moderate substance use, whether it is alcohol, cigarettes, food or caffeine
- **Talking to their teenagers openly and honestly** - discussions regarding substance use can help foster principles of healthy behaviour
- Talking to their children **about feelings, as well as ideas**. This should be done **without being judgemental or punishing them**. This can help them to accept their emotions and recognise that they have choices in dealing with their emotions.
- Encouraging supportive relationships between children and other adults or responsible young persons. This can foster **communication, even about issues that parents are uncomfortable speaking about**.
- **Showing their children that their opinions and decisions matter**. **As they** (the children) become older, they form



definite ideas about matters that concern them and they can develop a true sense of importance when they see that their opinions and actions are taken seriously and **can affect another person**, like their parent.

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

Asking for help from professionals is the first important step. Parents can **start by taking their child to a doctor** who can screen for signs of drug use and other related health conditions. It really takes courage to seek help for a child with a possible drug problem, because there is a lot of hard work ahead for both of you.

Alternatively, parents can **take their child to a social worker for assessment and possible referral to a rehabilitation facility** for further specialist interventions.

Parents can also seek help on how to support and deal with addiction by **joining support groups** for parents with children using drugs. This will empower them with the skills necessary to cope with the demands of parenting such children.

WHAT IF THE CHILD REFUSES TO COOPERATE?

Parents should try by all means to encourage the child to seek treatment as **acceptance is the first step to recovery**. This can be done with the help of a professional, trusted family member or a close friend.

In cases where the child becomes violent and is a danger to himself/herself or others – a court order must be sought. The court order will instruct that the child must be taken to the nearest provincial hospital for containment and necessary intervention that may result in him/her being admitted to a rehabilitation centre.

SUBSTANCE REHABILITATION FACILITIES

The provincial government offers rehabilitation services for free or at a nominal fee. Privately owned facilities offer these services for a fee. These fees are usually covered by the major medical aids.