

**Publications**

Revised October 2019

# Step by Step Guides to Finding Treatment for Drug Use Disorders

---

## Table of Contents

Step by Step Guides to Finding Treatment for Drug Use Disorders

Table of Contents

If You Have a Problem with Drugs: For Adults

If You Have a Problem with Drugs: For Teens and Young Adults

If Your Adult Friend or Loved One Has a Problem with Drugs

If Your Teen or Young Adult Has a Problem with Drugs

# Step by Step Guides to Finding Treatment for Drug Use Disorders

## Table of Contents

This publication is filled with resources and information to help you or someone you care about who might have a drug use problem.

**Need help for a Substance Use issue? Choose the Step-by-Step guide that is right for you.**

- [You are an Adult Seeking Help](#)
- [You are a Teen or Young Adult](#)
- [You Want to Help an Adult Seek Treatment](#)
- [You Care for a Teen or Young Adult](#)
- Step by Step Guide [en español](#)

## If You Have a Problem with Drugs: For Adults

## How To Recognize a Substance Use Disorder

## How do I know if I am addicted?



If you can't stop taking a drug even if you want to, or if the urge to use drugs is too strong to control, even if you know the drug is causing harm, you might be addicted. Here are some questions to ask yourself:

1. Do you think about drugs a lot?
2. Did you ever try to stop or cut down on your drug usage but couldn't?
3. Have you ever thought you couldn't fit in or have a good time without the use of drugs?
4. Do you ever use drugs because you are upset or angry at other people?
5. Have you ever used a drug without knowing what it was or what it would do to you?
6. Have you ever taken one drug to get over the effects of another?
7. Have you ever made mistakes at a job or at school because you were using drugs?
8. Does the thought of running out of drugs really scare you?
9. Have you ever stolen drugs or stolen to pay for drugs?
10. Have you ever been arrested or in the hospital because of your drug use?
11. Have you ever overdosed on drugs?
12. Has using drugs hurt your relationships with other people?

If the answer to some or all of these questions is yes, you might have an addiction. People from all backgrounds can get an addiction. Addiction can happen at any age, but it usually starts when a person is young. See NIDA's video, below:

## Anyone Can Become Addicted to Drugs

[View Transcript](#)

---

Through scientific advances, we know more than ever about how drugs work in the brain. We also

know that drug addiction can be successfully treated to help people stop using drugs and lead productive lives. If you think you might be addicted, seek the advice of your doctor or an addiction specialist.

## Why can't I stop using drugs on my own?

Repeated drug use changes the brain, including parts of the brain that enable you to exert self-control. These and other changes can be seen clearly in brain imaging studies of people with drug addictions. These brain changes explain why quitting is so difficult, even if you feel ready. See NIDA's video, below:

## Why Are Drugs So Hard to Quit?

[View Transcript](#)

---

## Will they make me stop taking drugs immediately?

The first step in treatment is "detox," which helps patients remove all of the drugs from their system. This is important because drugs impair the mental abilities you need to stay in treatment. When patients first stop using drugs, they can experience a variety of physical and emotional withdrawal symptoms, including depression, anxiety, and other mood disorders; restlessness; and sleeplessness. Treatment centers are very experienced in helping you get through this process and keeping you safe. Depending on what drugs you are addicted to, there may also be medications that will make you feel a little better during drug withdrawal, which makes it easier to stop using.

## What if I have been in rehab before?

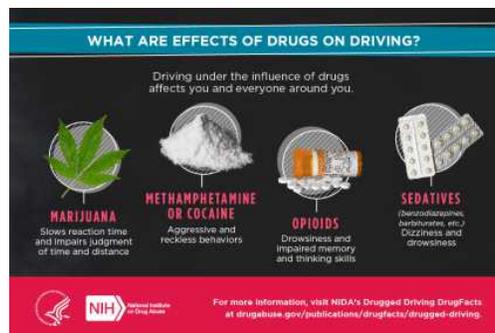
This means you have already learned many of the skills needed to recover from addiction and should try it again. Relapse should not discourage you. Relapse rates with addiction are similar to rates for other chronic diseases many people live with, such as hypertension and asthma. Treatment of chronic diseases involves changing deeply imbedded behaviors, and relapse

sometimes goes with the territory—it does not mean treatment failed. A return to drug use indicates that treatment needs to be started again or adjusted, or that you might benefit from a different approach.

## People have told me I shouldn't use drugs and drive, but I feel fine when driving. Can I trust my judgment on driving?

The most responsible thing you can do is stop driving while using drugs. This can be inconvenient, but it will show loved ones you are serious about getting better. Specific drugs act differently on the brain, but all illicit drugs and many prescription drugs impair skills necessary for the safe operation of a vehicle. These include motor skills, balance and coordination, perception, attention, reaction time, and judgment. Even small amounts of some drugs can have measurable effects on driving ability. Drugs also impact your ability to tell if you are impaired, so you should not trust your own judgment on driving until you receive an evaluation and treatment. For more, see our [DrugFacts on drugged driving](#).

If you drive for a living or need to use a vehicle in the course of your workday, you should be aware of your employer's tools and responsibilities related to drug testing. There is a [Drug-Free Workplace Helpline](#) at 800-967-5752.



## I take drugs because I feel depressed—nothing else seems to work. If I stop, I'll feel much worse—how do I deal with that?

It is very possible you need to find treatment for both depression and addiction. This is very common. It's called "comorbidity," "co-occurrence," or "dual diagnosis" when you have more than one health problem at the same time. It is important that you discuss all of your symptoms and behaviors with

your treatment team. There are many nonaddictive drugs that can help with depression or other mental health issues. Sometimes health care providers might not communicate with each other as well as they should, so you can be your own best advocate and make sure all of your health providers know about all of the health issues that concern you. People who have co-occurring issues should be treated for all of them at the same time. For more information see our [DrugFacts on comorbidity](#).

**Note:** If you ever feel so depressed that you think about hurting yourself, there is a hotline you can call: 1-800-273-TALK (8255). This is called the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, and you can share all of your problems with them. A caring, nonjudgmental voice will be on the other end, listening.

## How to Find Help

If I want help, where do I start?



©iStock/[Evgeny Sergeev](#)

---

Asking for help is the first important step. Visiting your doctor for a possible referral to treatment is one way to do it. You can ask if they are comfortable discussing drug use screening and treatment. If not, ask for a referral to another doctor. You can also contact an addiction specialist. There are 3,500 board-certified physicians who specialize in addiction in the United States. The [American Society of Addiction Medicine website](#) has [resources](#) for patients and their families, including information on how to find a physician who can treat addiction. You do not need a doctor's name; simply fill out the zip code section, and it will reveal treatment experts in your area. In addition, the [American Academy of Addiction Psychiatry](#) also has a [Patient Referral Program](#).

It takes a lot of courage to seek help for a drug problem because there is a lot of hard work ahead. However, treatment can work, and people recover from addiction every day. Like other chronic diseases, addiction can be managed successfully. Treatment enables people to counteract addiction's powerful, disruptive effects on brain and behavior and regain control of their lives.

## How do I find a treatment center?

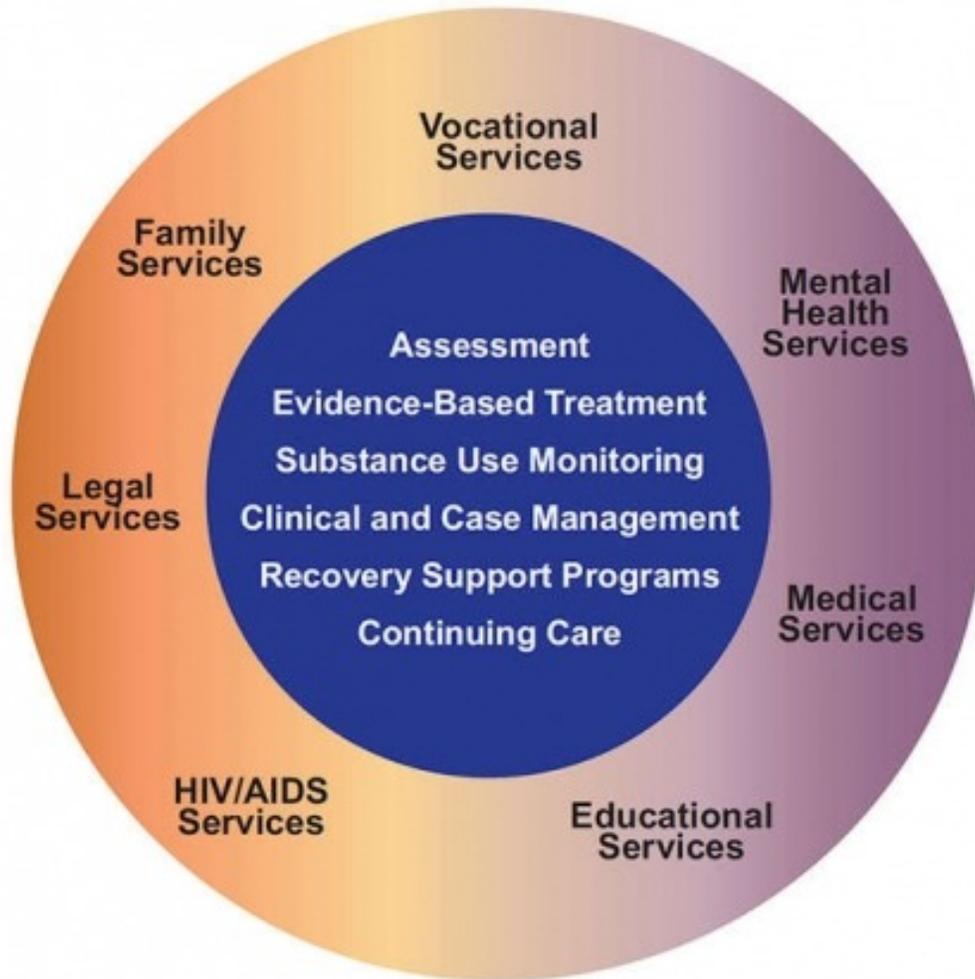
If you or your medical specialist decides you can benefit from substance use treatment, you have many options. You can look for a treatment center online at <https://findtreatment.gov/> by simply entering your zip code. If you have difficulty navigating the site or prefer to speak with someone on the phone, you can call the helpline and get some advice on how to proceed: 1-800-662-HELP (4357). This service is supported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This online treatment finder will allow you to search geographically and will also give you information about the treatment center.

## Treatment Information

### What do I look for in a treatment center?

Treatment approaches must be tailored to address each patient's drug use pattern and also their drug-

related medical, psychiatric, and social problems. Some treatment centers offer outpatient treatment programs, which allows you to continue to perform some of your daily responsibilities. However, some people do better in inpatient (residential) treatment. An addiction specialist can advise you about your best options. NIDA has put 30 years of research into finding general principles of drug addiction that are most effective ([NIDA's Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment](#)). NIDA has also developed [a booklet that outlines 5 questions you can ask when looking for a treatment program](#). You might want to have these materials on hand when you talk to treatment centers to help you find the best treatment program for your needs.



## **Components of Comprehensive Drug Use Treatment**

The best treatment programs provide a combination of therapies and other services to meet the needs of the individual patient.

---

### **Will I be treated by a doctor?**

There are different kinds of addiction specialists who will be involved in your care, including doctors, nurses, therapists, social workers, and others. In some treatment programs, different specialists work as a team to help you recover from your addiction.

### **What kind of counseling should I get?**

Behavioral treatment (also known as "talk therapy") helps patients engage in the treatment process, change their attitudes and behaviors related to drug use, and increase healthy life skills. These treatments can also enhance the effectiveness of medications and help people stay in treatment longer. Treatment for drug use and addiction can be delivered in many different settings using a variety of behavioral approaches. You can read our [DrugFacts about the different kinds of counseling and other behavioral treatments](#).

### **Will I need medication?**

Some people do, and that is a good question to ask your treatment provider. Medications are currently available to treat addictions to alcohol, nicotine, and opioids (heroin and prescription pain relievers), and your treatment team might recommend one of those medicines. There are also medicines to treat mental health conditions (such as depression) that might be contributing to the addiction. In addition, medication is sometimes prescribed to help with the symptoms associated with drug withdrawal. When medication is available, it can be combined with behavioral therapy to ensure success for most patients. Some treatment centers follow the philosophy that they should not treat a drug addiction with other drugs, but research shows that with opioid use disorders, using medication is generally the most effective approach.

Read more about what [treatments are available to treat your friend or loved one's addiction](#).

## Support Groups

### What about 12-step programs—Do they work?

Although they are not treatment or a substitute for treatment, self-help groups like 12-step programs can be a great source of support and encouragement while a person is engaged in treatment, and after. The most well-known self-help groups are those affiliated with [Alcoholics Anonymous \(AA\)](#), [Narcotics Anonymous \(NA\)](#), and [Cocaine Anonymous \(CA\)](#), all of which are based on the 12-step model.

Most drug addiction treatment programs encourage patients to participate in a self-help group during and after formal treatment. So long as they do not discourage participants from taking medications (which are a crucial part of treatment for opioid addiction and can be helpful in treating alcohol or nicotine addiction), these groups can be particularly helpful during recovery, as they are a source of ongoing communal support and encouragement to stay in recovery. Information on local meetings can be found on their websites. Support groups for family members of people with addictions, like [Al-anon or Alateen](#), can also be helpful.

There are other groups in the private sector that can provide a lot of support. To find meetings in your area, contact local hospitals, treatment centers, or faith-based organizations. These organizations often coordinate support groups for substance use.

## Cost and Privacy Issues

### How will I find treatment that is affordable?

The [Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator](#) provided by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration provides payment information for each of the treatment services listed, including information on sliding fee scales and payment assistance. You should select the “substance use facilities” section and you can enter a zip code. If you find it difficult to navigate or prefer to talk on the phone, you can call the treatment helpline at 1-800-662-4357 or 1-800-487-4889 (TTY). You can also go to the "[Frequently Asked Questions](#)" section for more information (See the question "Where can a person with no money and no insurance get treatment?"). In addition, to ask about treatment centers that offer low- or no-cost treatment, you can also contact your [state behavioral health agency](#)—many states offer help with payment for substance use treatment.

Note that the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act ensures that co-pays, deductibles, and visit limits are generally not more restrictive for mental health and substance use disorder benefits than they are for medical and surgical benefits. The Affordable Care Act builds on this law and requires coverage of mental health and substance use disorder services as one of ten essential health benefits categories. Under the essential health benefits rule, individual and small group health plans are required to comply with these parity regulations. For more information on the Affordable Care Act, you can call 1-800-318-2596 or go to <https://www.healthcare.gov/>.

When you research payment options, be sure you are speaking to people familiar with the new rules (old websites and pamphlets will not necessarily be accurate.)

**A note on health insurance for veterans:** If the person needing treatment is a veteran or is covered by health benefits for veterans, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) can help you find VA services near you. Visit the [VA Substance Use Disorder Program Locator](#) to do your search.

## If I seek treatment, I am worried that other people will find out. How do I keep it quiet?

You can tell your employer or friends you need to go on medical leave. If you talk to your doctor or another medical expert, privacy laws prevent them from sharing your medical information with anyone outside of the health care system without your permission. In addition, most health care providers who specialize in addiction treatment can't share your information with anyone (even other providers) without your written permission. For more information on how your private medical information is protected by law, read the [HHS information on Health Information Privacy \(HIPAA\)](#) and the [substance use confidentiality regulations \(PDF, 388KB\)](#).

In certain cases—when health professionals believe you might be a danger to yourself or to others, the provider may be able to share relevant information with family members. Here is [more information on when it is appropriate for the clinician to share protected information](#).

## Resources

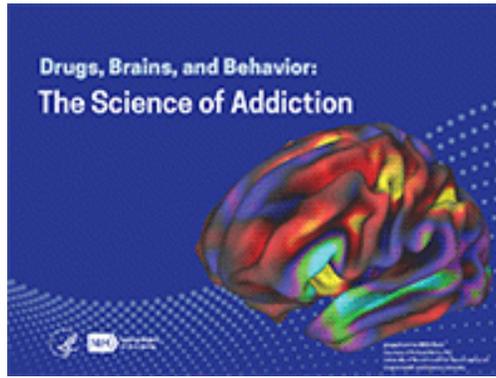
### What if I want to participate in research studies?

- To read some general information about being a part of NIH research studies, see [NIH Clinical Trials and You](#).
- To search for a clinical trial that might be right for you, check out [clinicaltrials.gov](#).

### Where can I find information on specific drugs?

- The main NIDA site has information on [specific drugs, including their effects on the body, brain, and behavior](#).
- NIDA also has an [Easy-to-Read website](#) with information about many drugs.

### Where can I find more information on treatment and recovery?



For more information on what to expect in [treatment and recovery](#), check out our publication on the science behind addiction, called [Drugs, Brains, and Behavior - The Science of Addiction](#), written by NIDA scientists and is based on many years of research.

There is more information on the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration's resource page on treatment, prevention, and recovery](#).

You might also want to check out the websites of some other NIH Institutes:

- [National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism](#)
  - [Treatment for Alcohol Problems: Finding and Getting Help](#)
- [National Institute of Mental Health](#)

## If You Have a Problem with Drugs: For Teens and Young Adults

## How To Recognize a Substance Use Disorder

## How do I know if I have a drug use problem?

Addiction can happen at any age, but it usually starts when a person is young. If you continue to use drugs despite harmful consequences, you could be addicted. It is important to talk to a medical professional about it—your health and future could be at stake.

Have friends or family told you that you are behaving differently for no apparent reason—such as acting withdrawn, frequently tired or depressed, or hostile? You should listen and ask yourself if they are right—and be honest with yourself. These changes could be a sign you are developing a drug-related problem. Parents sometimes overlook such signs, believing them to be a normal part of the teen years. Only you know for sure if you are developing a problem because of your drug use. Here are some other signs:

- hanging out with different friends
- not caring about your appearance
- getting worse grades in school
- missing classes or skipping school
- losing interest in your favorite activities
- getting in trouble in school or with the law
- having different eating or sleeping habits
- having more problems with family members and friends

There is no special type of person who becomes addicted. It can happen to anyone. (See NIDA's video below)

[View Transcript](#)

---

Thanks to science, we know more than ever before about how drugs work in the brain, and we also know that addiction can be successfully treated to help young people stop using drugs and lead productive lives. Asking for help early, when you first suspect you have a problem, is important; don't wait to become addicted before you seek help. If you think you are addicted, there is treatment that can work. Don't wait another minute to ask for help.

## Why can't I stop using drugs on my own?

Repeated drug use changes the brain. Brain imaging studies of drug-addicted people show changes in areas of the brain that are needed to learn and remember, make good decisions, and control yourself. Quitting is difficult, even for those who feel ready. NIDA has an excellent video (below) that explains why drugs are so hard to quit (hint: it's all about the brain). If you aren't sure you are addicted, it would be helpful for you to look at this brief video. It helps explain why your inability to stop using drugs does not mean you're a bad person, just that you have an illness that needs to be treated.

## Why Are Drugs So Hard to Quit?

[View Transcript](#)

---

## I don't feel well when I stop using drugs. Do treatment centers force people to stop taking drugs immediately?

Treatment is always based on the person's needs. However, if you are still using a drug when you are admitted to a treatment program, one of the first things addiction specialists need to do is help you safely remove drugs from your system (called "detox"). This is important because drugs impair the mental abilities you need to make treatment work for you.

When people first stop using drugs, they can experience different physical and emotional withdrawal symptoms, including depression, anxiety, and other mood disorders, as well as restlessness and sleeplessness. Remember that treatment centers are very experienced in helping you get through this

process and keeping you safe and comfortable during it. Depending on your situation, you might also be given medications to reduce your withdrawal symptoms, making it easier to stop using.

## I tried rehab once and it didn't work—why should I try it again?

If you have already been in rehab, it means you have already learned many of the skills needed to recover from addiction, and you should try it again. Relapsing (going back to using drugs after getting off them temporarily) does not mean the first treatment failed. People with all kinds of diseases relapse; people with other chronic diseases such as high blood pressure and asthma—which have both physical and behavioral components—relapse about as much as people who have addictions.

Treatment of all chronic diseases, including addiction, involves making tough changes in how you live and act, so setbacks are to be expected along the way. A return to drug use means treatment needs to be started again or adjusted, or that you might need a different treatment this time.

## I don't like lying to my parents but, they don't understand me and my problems. If we talk about drugs, they will just yell at me. How can I avoid a fight?

First of all, remember that they were teens once, and they understand teen life more than you think. Secondly, when you first tell them about your problem, they might get angry out of fear and worry. They might raise their voices because they are very, very worried about you and your future. Try to stay calm and simply ask for help. Repeat over and over again that you need their help.

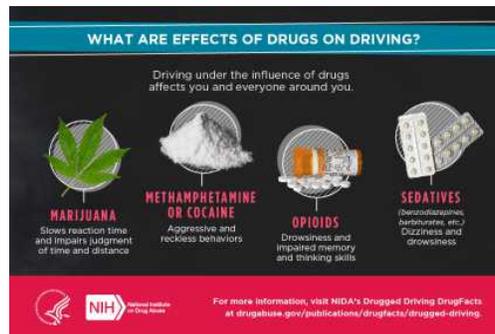
Parents do get angry when they find out their kids have been lying to them. You'd do the same! Be honest with them. Let them know you want to change and need their help.

## I am also afraid my parents will take away the car keys—what can I do about that?

The single most responsible thing you can do is stop driving until you get help for your drug use. This might be inconvenient, but if you do drugs and drive, you could end up not only killing yourself but killing others as well. That could lead to a lifetime in prison. This is no different than drinking and

driving. For more see our [DrugFacts on drugged driving](#).

If you tell your parents that you are willing to give up your driving privileges, they will know you are serious about getting help.



## Taking drugs helps me feel less depressed—what's wrong with that?

The relief you feel is only temporary and can cause more problems down the road, as your brain and body start to crave more and more drugs just to feel normal. It is very possible you need to find treatment for your depression as well as for your drug use. This is very common. It is called "comorbidity" or "co-occurrence" when you have more than one health problem at the same time. For more information, see [Drug Facts for Teens Co-Occurring Substance Use and Other Mental Health Issues](#).

Be certain to tell your doctor about your drug use, as well as any depression or anxiety you feel, or any other mental health issues you are experiencing. There are many nonaddictive medicines that can help with depression or other mental health issues. Sometimes doctors do not talk to each other as much as they should. For example, a therapist you might be seeing for depression does not always consult with your pediatrician. So you need to be your own best friend and advocate—and make sure all of your health care providers know about all of the health issues that concern you. You should be treated for all of them at the same time.

**Note:** If you ever feel so depressed that you think about hurting yourself, there is a hotline you can call: 1-800-273-TALK (8255). This is called the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, and you can share all of your problems with them. A caring, nonjudgmental voice will be on the other end,

listening.

## How to Find Help

If I want to ask for help, where do I start?



©Shutterstock/[antonio guillem](#)

Asking for help is the first important step. If you have a good relationship with your parents, you should start there. Ask them to read "[What to Do If Your Teen or Young Adult Has a Problem with Drugs](#)", which is similar to this page but written for parents. If you do not have a good relationship with your parents (or if they are having some problems of their own and might need help), find an adult you trust to ask for help.

The next step is to go to your doctor. You might want to ask your parents to call your doctor in advance to see they are comfortable discussing drug use. Believe it or not, sometimes doctors are as uncomfortable discussing it as teens are! You will want to find a doctor who has experience with these issues. Your parents can find you a great doctor by checking out this [fact sheet](#).

Together with your parents and doctor, you can decide if you should enter a treatment program. If you do not have a good relationship with your parents, ask another adult you trust to help you.

It takes a lot of courage to seek help for a possible drug problem because there is a lot of hard work ahead and it might get in the way of school and social activities. But treatment works, and you can recover. It just takes time, patience, and hard work. It is important because you will not be ready to go out into the world on your own until you take care of this issue. Treatment will help you counteract

addiction's powerful hold on your brain and behavior so you can regain control of your life.

## Treatment Information

### What will the doctor ask me?

The doctor will ask you a series of questions about your use of alcohol and drugs and other risky behaviors like driving under the influence or riding with other people who have been using drugs or alcohol. Your doctor can help you the best if you tell the truth. The doctor might also ask for a urine and/or blood test. This will provide important information about your drug use and how it is affecting your health.

If your goal is to truly get better and get your old life back, you should cooperate with your doctor. If you think problems at home are only making it harder to stay away from drugs and alcohol, share that information with your doctor. If your doctor recommends counseling or treatment, you should give it a try. There is a whole network of trained adults out there who want to help you.

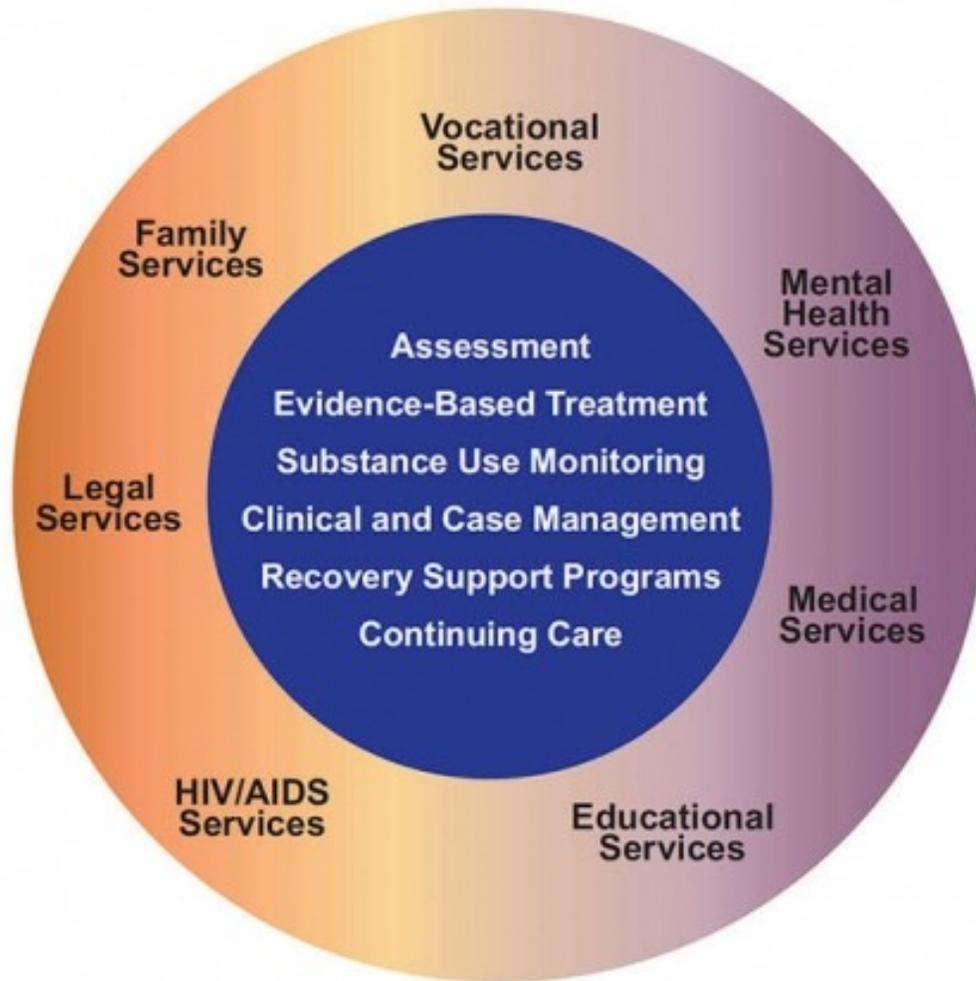


Photo by NIDA

### **Components of Comprehensive Drug Use Treatment**

The best treatment programs provide a combination of therapies and other services to meet the needs of the individual patient.

---

## What is treatment like?

Treatment for drug problems is tailored to each patient's unique drug use patterns and other medical, psychiatric, and social problems.

Some treatment centers offer outpatient treatment programs, which would allow you to stay in school,

at least part-time. Some teens and young adults, though, do better in inpatient (residential) treatment, where you stay overnight for a period of time. An addiction specialist can advise you about your best options.

NIDA has created an [online publication outlining the best treatment principles for your age group](#). You might want to have these materials handy when you talk to treatment centers, to help you ask the right questions.

## Who will be helping me in treatment?

Different kinds of addiction specialists will likely be involved in your care—including doctors, nurses, therapists, social workers, and others. They will work as a team.

## Are there medications that can help me stop using?

Yes. Medications are currently available to treat addictions to alcohol, nicotine, and opioids (heroin and prescription pain relievers), and your treatment team might recommend one of those medicines. There are also medicines to treat mental health conditions (such as depression) that might be contributing to the addiction. In addition, medication is sometimes prescribed to help you feel better during drug withdrawal. When medication is available, it can be combined with behavioral therapy to ensure success for most patients. Some treatment centers follow the philosophy that they should not treat a drug addiction with other drugs, but research shows that with many drug issues, including opioid use disorders, using medication is generally the most effective approach.

Read more about [what treatments are available to treat your addiction](#).

## What kind of counseling should I get?

Behavioral treatments ("talk therapy") help teens and young adults increase healthy life skills and learn how to be happy without drugs. They can give you some coping skills and will keep you motivated to recover from your drug problem.

Treatment can be one-on-one with a doctor, but some of the most effective treatments for teens are ones that involve one or more of your parents or other family members. You can read more about the [different kinds of behavioral treatment options](#)

## Support Groups

I have heard of 12-step programs and other support groups. What are those like?

Although they are not treatment or a substitute for treatment, self-help groups like 12-step programs can be a great source of support and encouragement while a person is in treatment, and after. The most well-known self-help groups are those affiliated with [Alcoholics Anonymous \(AA\)](#), [Narcotics Anonymous \(NA\)](#), [Cocaine Anonymous \(CA\)](#), all of which are based on the 12-step model. You can ask your treatment provider if there are useful teen versions of these groups in your area.

Most drug addiction treatment programs encourage patients to participate in a self-help group during and after formal treatment, as long as they do not discourage you from taking medications, which are a crucial part of treatment for opioid addiction and can be helpful in treating alcohol or nicotine addiction. These groups can be particularly helpful during recovery, as they are a source of ongoing communal support and encouragement to stay in recovery. Information on local meetings can be found on their websites. Support groups for family members of people with addictions, like Al-anon and Alateen, can also be helpful.

There are other groups in the private sector that can provide a lot of support. To find meetings in your area, contact local hospitals, treatment centers, or faith-based organizations. These organizations often coordinate support groups for substance use.

## Cost and Privacy Issues

If your parents are worried about the cost of treatment, ask them to read [this guide](#) designed for people who care for teens with substance use issues. sheets.

## I'll talk to a doctor, but I am afraid they will tell my parents everything. Can I prevent that?

There are privacy laws that prevent your doctor from telling your parents everything. They can't even tell law enforcement about your drug use, in case that worries you. But your parents might ask you to sign a permission form, so your doctor can discuss your issues with them. If you feel your parents are truly trying to help you, you should consider signing the form, because having accurate information will help them find the right care and treatment for you. For more information on how private medical information is protected by law, read the [HHS information on Health Information Privacy \(HIPAA\)](#).

**There is one exception to this rule:** Doctors can speak to parents and some officials if they think you are in danger of hurting yourself or others.

If you feel you are being abused by your parents or caretakers, you should discuss it with your doctor or contact a school counselor. If you are being abused, you can call the [National Child Abuse Hotline](#) for help at 1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453).

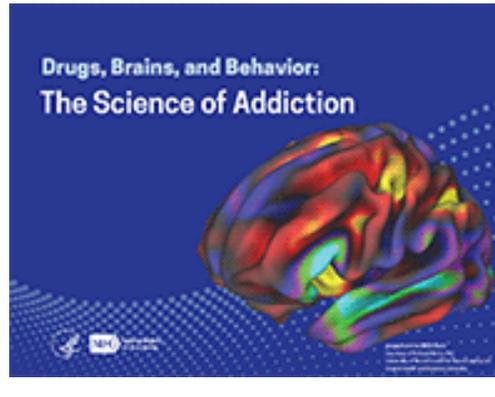
## Resources

### Where can I find information on specific drugs?

- You can review the [NIDA for Teens site](#), with information on a variety of drugs and drug use issues.
- The NIDA website also has information on [specific drugs, including their effects on the body, brain, and behavior](#).
- NIDA also has an [Easy-to-Read website](#) with information about many drugs.

- You can also check out the [Scholastic e-poster that discusses the health effects of drugs.](#)

## Where can I find more information on treatment and recovery?



More information on what to expect in treatment and recovery is in our publication on the science behind addiction, called [Drugs, Brains, and Behavior - The Science of Addiction](#), written by NIDA scientists based on many years of research.

There is more information on the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration's resource page on treatment, prevention, and recovery.](#)

You might also want to check out the websites of some other NIH Institutes:

- [National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism](#)
  - [Treatment for Alcohol Problems: Finding and Getting Help](#)
- [National Institute of Mental Health](#)
- [National Institute of Child Health and Human Development](#)

## If Your Adult Friend or Loved One Has a Problem with Drugs

# How to Recognize a Substance Use Disorder

How do I know if my adult friend or loved one has a substance use problem?



This page is filled with resources and information to help someone you care about who might have a drug\* use problem. First, try to answer the questions below as honestly as possible. If the person is willing, you can include him or her in the discussion. (\*"Drugs" is used here to refer to illicit drugs, prescription drugs, or alcohol.)

1. Does the person take the drug in larger amounts or for longer than intended?
2. Do they want to cut down or stop using the drug but can't?
3. Do they spend a lot of time getting, using, or recovering from the drug?
4. Do they have cravings and urges to use the drug?
5. Are they unable to manage responsibilities at work, home, or school because of drug use?
6. Do they continue to use a drug, even when it causes problems in relationships?
7. Do they give up important social, recreational, or work-related activities because of drug use?
8. Do they use drugs again and again, even when it puts them in danger?
9. Do they continue to use, even while knowing that a physical or mental problem could have been caused or made worse by the drug?
10. Do they take more of the drug to get the wanted effect?
11. Have they developed withdrawal symptoms, which can be relieved by taking more of the drug?

(Some withdrawal symptoms can be obvious, but others can be more subtle—like irritability or nervousness.)

If the answer to some or all of these questions is yes, your friend or loved one might have a substance use problem. In the most severe cases, it is called an addiction. It can happen to people from all backgrounds, rich or poor, and it can happen at any age. See NIDA's video, below.

## Anyone Can Become Addicted to Drugs

[View Transcript](#)

---

Through scientific research, we now know more than ever about how drugs work in the brain, and we also know that drug addiction can be successfully treated to help people stop using drugs and lead productive lives.

If you think your adult friend or loved one might be addicted, you cannot fix the problem by yourself, but there are some steps you can take. Encourage your loved one to explore the issue by reviewing this page: [What to Do If You Have a Problem with Drugs: For Adults](#). Offer to walk the person through the information and to help access the resources.

If the person is initially not willing to be helped, you can read the information below to learn more about drug addiction and to see if there are resources or information that might convince your loved one to seek help.

## Why can't people stop using drugs on their own?

Repeated drug use changes the brain, including parts of the brain that give a person self-control. These and other changes can be seen clearly in brain imaging studies of people with a drug addiction. These brain changes explain why quitting is so difficult, even when an addicted person feels ready. See NIDA's video, below.

## Why Are Drugs So Hard to Quit?

## If my friend or loved one refuses to cooperate, should we conduct an intervention?

Many people are compelled to enter treatment by the pressure of their family, friends, or a court system. However, there is no evidence that confrontational "interventions" like those familiar from TV programs are effective at convincing people they have a problem or motivating them to change. It is even possible for such confrontational encounters to escalate into violence or backfire in other ways. Instead, you should focus on creating incentives to at least get the person to a doctor. Often people will listen to professionals rather than have conversations with friends and family members, as the latter encounters can sometimes be driven by fear, accusations, and emotions.

## My friend or loved one is afraid of being forced to stop using drugs and what will happen. Do treatment centers force people to stop taking drugs immediately?

People of all ages with substance use disorders live in fear of what will happen if their drugs are taken away. You can ensure the person you care about that professional treatment centers will keep them safe and as comfortable as possible if a detoxification process is needed.

Treatment is always individualized based on the person's needs. However, if someone is using a drug upon admission to a treatment program, one of the first things needed is to help safely remove the drugs from their system (often referred to as "detox"). This is important because drugs impair the mental abilities needed to engage with and stay in treatment.

When patients first stop using drugs, they can experience a variety of physical and emotional withdrawal symptoms, including depression, anxiety, and other mood disorders; restlessness, and sleeplessness. Remind your loved one that treatment centers are very experienced in helping patients get through this process and keeping them safe during it. Depending on your loved one's situation, there may also be medications to reduce these symptoms, which makes it easier to stop using.

## My friend was in rehab before but relapsed afterward. How do we know treatment will work this time?

This means your friend has already learned many of the skills needed to recover from addiction and should try it again. The fear of relapse should not get in the way of trying treatment again. People being treated or recovering from addiction relapse about as often as do people with other chronic diseases, such as hypertension and asthma. Treatment of any chronic disease involves changing deeply imbedded behaviors, and relapse sometimes goes with the territory—it doesn't mean treatment failed. A return to drug use indicates that treatment needs to be started again or adjusted, and your friend might benefit from a different treatment approach.

## I am worried that my loved one is driving while using drugs. What do I do?

If you share a vehicle, you should demand that your loved one see a physician before using the car again. This can be very inconvenient for both of you, but it is imperative that drug users not drive. Your loved one's life, yours, and others' could be at risk.

In many cases, you may not be able to control your loved one's ability to drive. You must tell them that the single most responsible thing to do is not drive while using drugs (including using prescription medications). All drugs can impair skills necessary for the safe operation of a vehicle, including motor skills, balance and coordination, perception, attention, reaction time, and judgment. Even small amounts of some drugs can have a measurable effect on driving ability.

Drugs also affect people's ability to tell if they are impaired—so you might have to make some difficult choices. If you believe your loved one is driving and impaired, you should consider calling law enforcement. This can be a difficult decision, but sometimes court intervention can actually help force a loved one to seek help. For more see our [DrugFacts on drugged driving](#).



If you are an employer and suspect an employee is using drugs, you should immediately suspend any driving privileges while you get it sorted out. You can contact this government helpline to find out more about workplace drug testing: Drug-Free Workplace Helpline: 800-967-5752 (800-WORKPLACE) or [HELPLINE@SAMHSA.HHS.GOV](mailto:HELPLINE@SAMHSA.HHS.GOV).

## If people take drugs because they feel depressed—but are depressed because drugs are overtaking their life---How do we know which problem came first?

It is very possible your loved one needs to find treatment for both depression and addiction. This is very common—it's called "comorbidity," "co-occurrence," or "dual diagnosis" when you have more than one health problem at the same time. Encourage your loved one to discuss all symptoms and behaviors with the doctor. There are many nonaddictive drugs that can help with depression or other mental health issues. Sometimes health care providers do not communicate with each other as well as they should, so you can be your loved one's advocate (with their permission) and make sure all related health care providers know about all of the health issues that concern you. People who have co-occurring issues should be treated for all of them at the same time. For more information see our [DrugFacts on comorbidity](#).

**Note:** If you know someone who is so depressed that they will do self-harm, there is a hotline that can help: The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255). You are also welcome to call to discuss your friend's symptoms and get advice on how to best handle the situation.

# How to Find Help

If my friend or loved one asks for my help, where do I start?



©iStock/[Evgeny Sergeev](#)

When people you care about ask for help, they have taken an important first step. If they are resistant to help, see if you can at least convince them to get an evaluation from a doctor.

You can always take steps to locate an appropriate physician or health professional and leave the information with your friend. You can call health professionals in advance to see if they are comfortable speaking with their patients about addiction. If not, ask for a referral to another doctor with more expertise in the area of addiction. There are 3,500 board-certified physicians who specialize in addiction in the United States. The [American Society of Addiction Medicine website](#) has [resources](#) for patients and their families, including information on how to find a physician who can treat addiction. You do not need a doctor's name; simply fill out the zip code section, and it will reveal treatment experts in your area. In addition, the [American Academy of Addiction Psychiatry](#) also has a [Patient Referral Program](#).

Emphasize to your friend or loved one that it takes a lot of courage to seek help for a drug problem because there is a lot of hard work ahead. There is a great deal of scientific evidence that treatment works, and people recover every day. Like other chronic diseases, addiction can be managed successfully. Treatment enables people to counteract the powerfully disruptive effects of drugs on the brain and behavior and to regain control of their lives. Like many diseases, it can take several attempts at treatment to find the right approach. But assure your friend or loved one that you will be supportive in their courageous effort.

## If my friend does go into treatment, how can I offer support?

This is a great conversation to have with your friend's treatment provider, if your loved one gives the provider permission to speak with you. Different patients need different levels of support. If there are difficult dynamics in a family group or set of friends, the counselor may recommend little contact for a while. It is important to tell friends struggling with addiction that you admire their courage for tackling this medical problem directly through treatment and that as long as they stick with the treatment plan, you will offer encouragement and support. When residential treatment is over, your friend will have to re-enter the community and it will be a difficult time. There will be triggers everywhere that could promote a relapse—such as driving by places where the person once took drugs or seeing friends who provided those drugs. You can encourage your friend to avoid these triggers, and you can make an effort to help identify those triggers. However, people addicted to drugs have to fight much of this struggle on their own, without the help and advice of friends, using the knowledge and skills learned in treatment. Offer as much love and support you can as long as your loved one continues to follow the treatment plan. If the patient relapses, you should encourage additional treatment.

## Treatment Information

### Can I explore treatment centers even if my friend is not willing to go into treatment?

Yes. If you find centers that might appeal to your friend, either by their location or medical approach, it might encourage them to enter treatment.

You can call this helpline and get some advice on how to proceed: 1-800-662-HELP (4357). This service is supported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. You can also look for a [treatment center online](#), which will allow you to search for a treatment center in your area and also give you information about the kind of addiction or patients it treats.

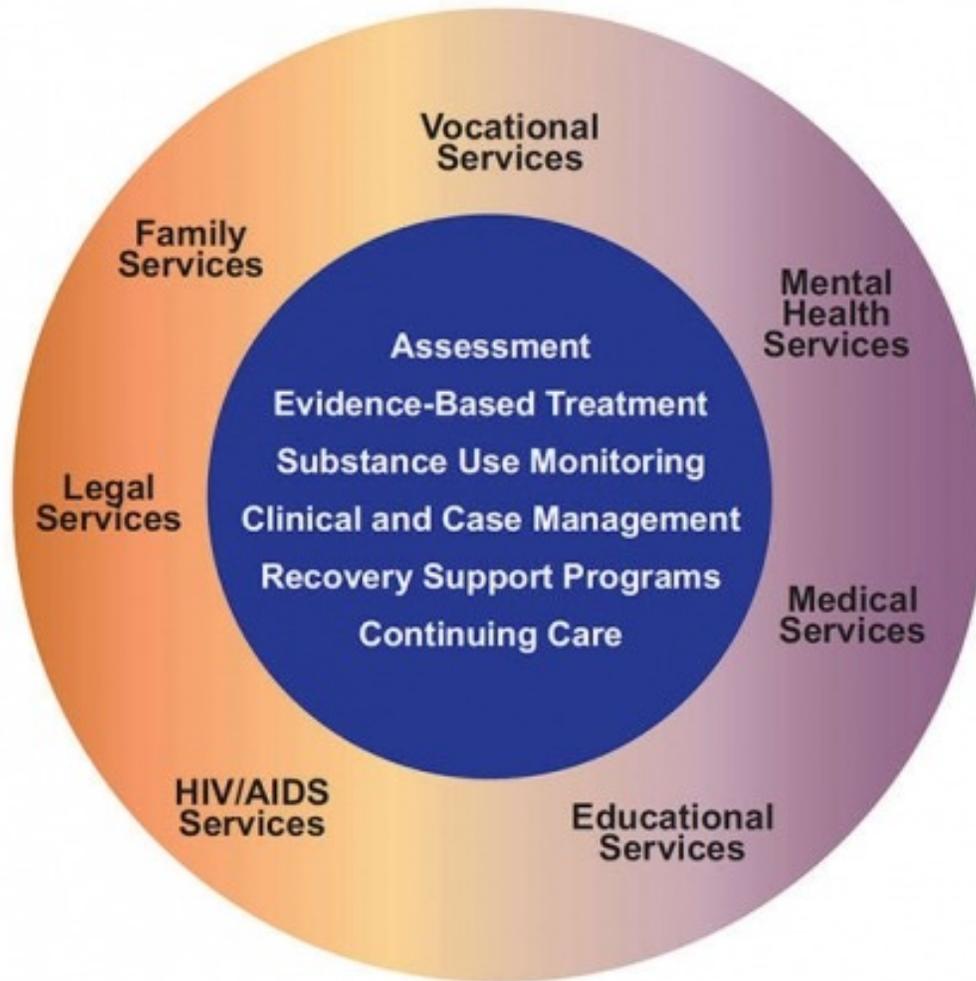


Photo by NIDA

### **Components of Comprehensive Drug Use Treatment**

The best treatment programs provide a combination of therapies and other services to meet the needs of the individual patient.

---

## What should I look for in a treatment center?

Treatment approaches must be tailored to address each patient's drug use patterns and also other medical, psychiatric, and social problems. Some treatment centers offer outpatient treatment programs, which allow patients to continue to perform some daily responsibilities. However, many people do better in inpatient (residential) treatment. An addiction specialist can advise your friend or

loved one about the most promising options.

NIDA's [Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment](#) compiles 30 years of research into a set of general principles and frequently asked questions about effective treatment. Using these principles, NIDA has developed [a booklet that outlines 5 questions you can ask when looking for a quality treatment program](#). You might want to have these materials on hand when you talk to treatment centers to help you ask the right questions.

## Who will be providing treatment?

There are different kinds of specialists who are involved in addiction care, including doctors, nurses, therapists, social workers, and others. In some treatment programs, different specialists work as a team to help patients recover from addiction.

## What is treatment like?

Everyone entering treatment for a substance use disorder is unique. That is why the patient and the treatment staff work together to develop an individualized treatment plan. First, patients are evaluated to see if there are medications available that can help. Treatment will also likely include behavioral therapy ("talk therapy") designed to engage the patient in the treatment process, alter destructive attitudes and behaviors related to drug use, and increase healthy life skills. Behavioral treatment can also enhance the effectiveness of medications that might be available and help patients stay in treatment longer.

Treatment for substance use disorders can be delivered in many different settings using a variety of different approaches. You can read more about the [different kinds of behavioral treatment options](#).

## Do most treatment centers offer medication?

Some do, and that is a good question to ask them. Medications are currently available to treat addictions to alcohol, nicotine, and opioids (heroin and prescription pain relievers), and your loved one's treatment team may recommend one of those medications. There are also medicines to treat mental health conditions (such as depression) that might be contributing to the addiction. In addition,

medication is sometimes prescribed to help with the symptoms associated with drug withdrawal. When medication is available, it can be combined with behavioral therapy to ensure success for most patients. Some treatment centers follow the philosophy that they should not treat a drug addiction with other drugs, but research shows that with opioid use disorders, using medication is generally the most effective approach.

Read more about [what treatments are available to treat your friend or loved one's addiction](#).

## Support Groups

### Do 12-step programs or other support groups work?

Although they are not treatment or a substitute for treatment, self-help groups like 12-step programs can be a great source of support and encouragement while a person is engaged in treatment, and after. The most well-known self-help groups are those affiliated with [Alcoholics Anonymous \(AA\)](#), [Narcotics Anonymous \(NA\)](#), and [Cocaine Anonymous \(CA\)](#), all of which are based on the 12-step model.

Most drug addiction treatment programs encourage patients to participate in a self-help group during and after formal treatment. So long as they do not discourage participants from taking medications (which are a crucial part of treatment for opioid addiction and can be helpful in treating alcohol or nicotine addiction), these groups can be particularly helpful during recovery, as they are a source of ongoing communal support and encouragement to stay in recovery. Information on local meetings can be found on their websites. Support groups for family members of people with addictions, like [Al-anon or Alateen](#), can also be helpful.

There are other groups in the private sector that can provide a lot of support. To find meetings in your area, contact local hospitals, treatment centers, or faith-based organizations. These organizations often coordinate support groups for substance use.

## Cost and Privacy Issues

My friend has considered treatment but is afraid of what others will think. What can I tell my friend?

Many employers, friends, and family members will be compassionate if they see a person is making a sincere effort to recover from a substance use problem. But you can also reassure your friend that laws protect the privacy of a person seeking drug treatment—or in fact, any medical treatment. Health care providers may not share information with anyone else without a patient’s permission. Some jobs may require a doctor's note saying an employee is being treated for a medical condition, but the nature of the condition need not be specified. For more information on how private medical information is protected by law, read the [HHS information on Health Information Privacy \(HIPAA\)](#).

How can people find a treatment center they can afford?



---

The [Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator](#) provided by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration provides payment information for each of the treatment services listed, including information on sliding fee scales and payment assistance. You should select the “substance use facilities” section and you can enter a zip code. If you find it difficult to navigate or prefer to talk on the phone, you can call the treatment helpline at 1-800-662-4357 or 1-800-487-4889 (TTY). You can also go to the "[Frequently Asked Questions](#)" section for more information (See “Where can a person with no money and no insurance get treatment?”). In addition, to ask about treatment centers that offer low- or no-cost treatment, you can also contact your [state behavioral health agency](#)—many states offer help with payment for substance use treatment.

Note that the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act ensures that co-pays, deductibles, and visit limits are generally not more restrictive for mental health and substance use disorder benefits than they are for medical and surgical benefits. The Affordable Care Act builds on this law and requires coverage of mental health and substance use disorder services as one of ten essential

health benefits categories. Under the essential health benefits rule, individual and small group health plans are required to comply with these parity regulations. For more information on the Affordable Care Act, you can call 1-800-318-2596 or go to <https://www.healthcare.gov/>.

When you research payment options, be sure you are speaking to people familiar with the new rules (old websites and pamphlets will not necessarily be accurate.)

**A note on health insurance for veterans:** If the person needing treatment is a veteran or is covered by health benefits for veterans, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) can help you find VA services near you. Visit the [VA Substance Use Disorder Program Locator](#) to do your search.

## Resources

I am not sure what drugs my loved one is taking. Where can I find information on specific drugs and their health effects?

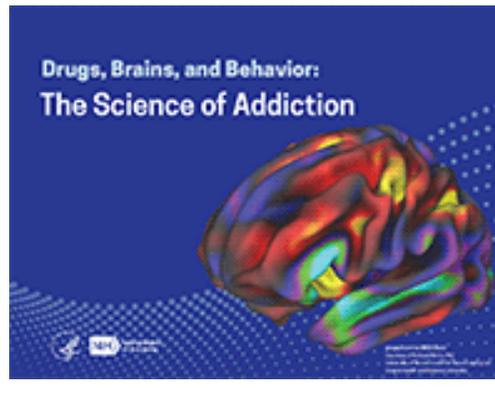
It is important to remember that people who struggle with addiction can have a lot of shame, fear, and anger, and do not always tell the truth about their drug use. You can focus instead on encouraging your loved one to see a doctor as a first step.

- The main NIDA site has information on [specific drugs, including their effects on the body, brain, and behavior](#).
- NIDA also has an [Easy-to-Read website](#) with information about many drugs.

What if my friend wants to participate in research studies?

- To read some general information about being a part of NIH research studies, see [NIH Clinical Trials and You](#).
- To search for a clinical trial that might be right for your friend or loved one, check out <http://clinicaltrials.gov/>

Where can I find more information on treatment and recovery?



More information on what to expect in treatment and recovery, check out our publication on the science behind addiction, called [Drugs, Brains, and Behavior - The Science of Addiction](#), written by NIDA scientists and is based on many years of research.

There is more information on the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration's resource page on treatment, prevention, and recovery](#).

You can also learn more at other NIH Institutes:

- [National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism](#)
  - [Treatment for Alcohol Problems: Finding and Getting Help](#)
- [National Institute of Mental Health](#)

**If Your Teen or Young Adult Has a Problem with Drugs**

# How To Recognize a Substance Use Disorder

How do I know if my teen or young adult has a substance use disorder?



Addiction can happen at any age, but it usually starts when a person is young. Teens who continue to use drugs despite harmful consequences could be addicted.

When adolescents start behaving differently for no apparent reason—such as acting withdrawn, frequently tired or depressed, or hostile—it could be a sign they are developing a drug-related problem. Parents and others may overlook such signs, believing them to be a normal part of puberty. Other signs include:

- a change in peer group
- carelessness with grooming
- decline in academic performance
- missing classes or skipping school
- loss of interest in favorite activities
- trouble in school or with the law
- changes in eating or sleeping habits
- deteriorating relationships with family members and friends

# Anyone Can Become Addicted to Drugs

[View Transcript](#)

---

Through scientific advances, we know more than ever before about how drugs work in the brain. We also know that addiction can be successfully treated to help young people stop using drugs and lead productive lives. Intervening early when you first spot signs of drug use in your teen is critical; don't wait for your teen to become addicted before you seek help. However, if a teen is addicted, treatment is the next step.

## Why can't some teens stop using drugs on their own?

Repeated drug use changes the brain. Brain imaging studies of people with drug addictions show changes in areas of the brain that are critical to judgment, decision-making, learning and memory, and behavior control. Quitting is difficult, even for those who feel ready. NIDA has an excellent video that explains why drugs are so hard to quit:

## Why Are Drugs So Hard to Quit?

[View Transcript](#)

---

It could be helpful to show your teen this video. It helps explain why the inability to stop using drugs is not a moral failing, but rather an illness that needs to be treated.

## If my child refuses to cooperate, should the family conduct an intervention?

Most teens, and many young adults still being supported by their family, only enter treatment when they are compelled to by the pressure of their family, the juvenile justice, or other court system. However, there is no evidence that confrontational "interventions" like those familiar from TV programs are effective. It is even possible for such confrontational encounters to escalate into violence or backfire in other ways. Instead, parents should focus on creating incentives to get the teen to a doctor. Oftentimes, young people will listen to professionals rather than family members, as the

latter encounters can sometimes be driven by fear, accusations, and emotions.

People of all ages with substance use disorders live in fear of what will happen if their drugs are taken away. You can ensure your teen that professional treatment centers will keep them safe and as comfortable as possible if a detoxification process is needed. Be sure to let your teen know that family and loved ones will stand by and offer loving support.

## How do we keep things stable in our home until my teen is in treatment?

First, talk to your teen. There are ways to have a conversation about drugs or other sensitive issues that will prevent escalation into an argument. [NIDA's Family Checkup tool](#) ([order hard copy](#)) gives science-based techniques for communicating with your child effectively without emotions getting in the way, as well as ways for setting limits and supervising your teen. Videos demonstrate the techniques discussed.

Acknowledge your child's opinions but know that many people with substance use problems are afraid and ashamed and might not always tell the truth. This is why it is important to involve medical professionals who have experience working with people struggling with substance use issues.

Second, if your teen has a driver's license, and you suspect drug use, you should take away your child's driving privileges. This could cause an inconvenience for the family, but could prevent a tragic accident. This could also be used as an incentive to get your child to agree to be evaluated by a medical professional. For more, see our [DrugFacts on drugged driving](#).



I have heard that teens and young adults who use drugs could be *self-medicating* because they feel depressed. How do we handle that problem as well?

It is very possible your child needs to find treatment for both depression and addiction. This is very common. It is called "comorbidity" or "co-occurrence" when you have more than one health problem at the same time. Parents should encourage their children to tell all of their health care providers about all of their symptoms and behaviors. There are many nonaddictive drugs that can help with depression or other mental health issues. Sometimes health care providers do not communicate with each other as well as they should, so you can be your child's advocate and make sure all relevant health care providers know about all of your child's health issues. Your child should be treated for all health issues at the same time. For more information, see [Drug Facts for Teens Co-Occurring Substance Use and Other Mental Health Issues](#).

**Note:** If your child ever feels so depressed that you think they will do self-harm, there is a hotline you or your child can call. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline's number is 1-800-273-TALK (8255). You are also welcome to call it to discuss your child's symptoms and get advice on how to best handle the situation.

## How to Find Help

If I want help for my teen or young adult, where do I start?



Asking for help from professionals is the first important step.

You can start by bringing your child to a doctor who can screen for signs of drug use and other related health conditions. You might want to ask in advance if the doctor is comfortable screening for drug use with standard assessment tools and making a referral to an appropriate treatment provider. If not, ask for a referral to another provider skilled in these issues.

You can also contact an addiction specialist directly. There are 3,500 board-certified physicians who specialize in addiction in the United States. The [American Society of Addiction Medicine website](#) has [resources](#) for patients and their families, including information on how to find a physician who can treat addiction. You do not need a doctor's name; simply fill out the zip code section, and it will reveal treatment experts in your area. In addition, the [American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry](#) has a [Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist Finder](#) on its website. you and the physician can decide if your teen or young adult should be referred to treatment.

It takes a lot of 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, and it interrupts academic, personal, and possibly athletic milestones expected during the teen years. However, treatment works, and teens can recover from addiction, although it may take time and patience. Treatment enables young people to counteract addiction's powerful disruptive effects on their brain and behavior so they can regain control of their lives. You want to be sure your teen is healthy before venturing into the world with more independence, and where drugs are more easily available.

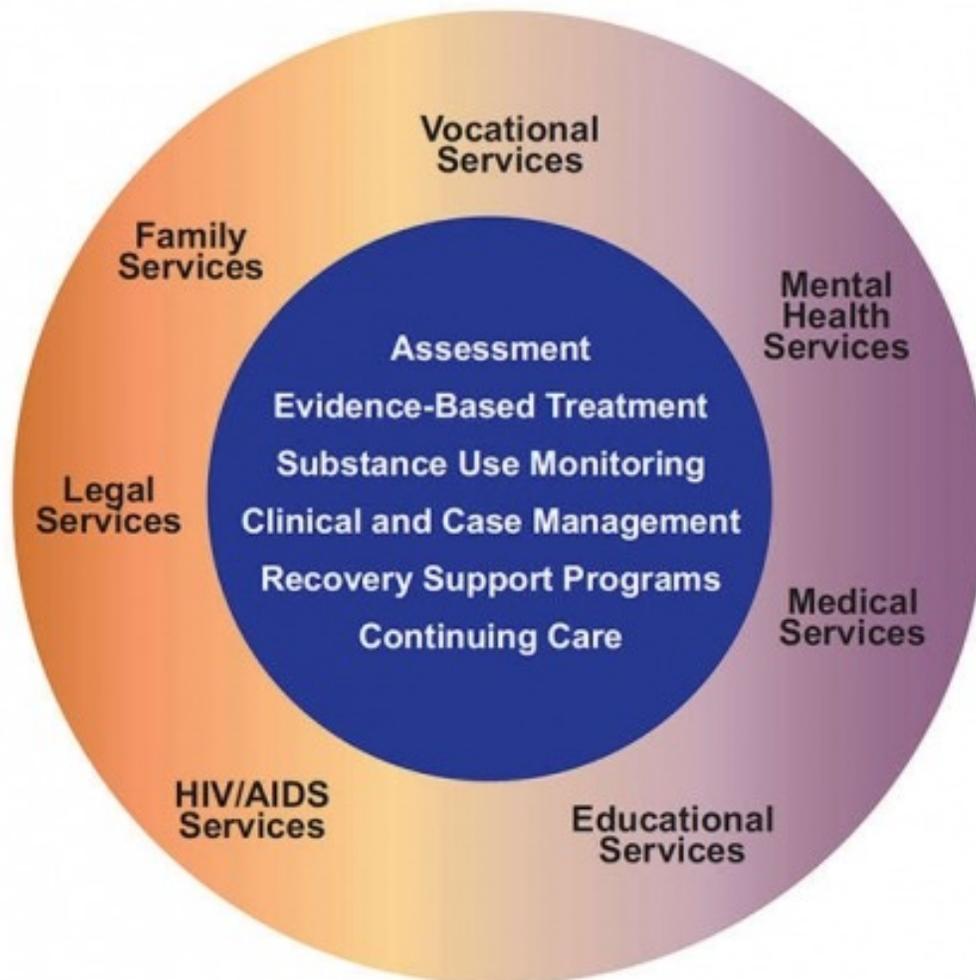
## What if my teen or young adult has been in rehab before?

This means your child has already learned many of the skills needed to recover from addiction, and will only benefit from further treatment. Relapse does not mean the first treatment failed. Relapse rates with addiction are similar to rates for other chronic diseases, such as hypertension and asthma. Treatment of chronic diseases involves changing deeply imbedded behaviors, so setbacks are to be expected along the way. A return to substance use indicates that treatment needs to be reinstated or adjusted, or that a different treatment might be needed.

# Treatment Information

## What kind of screening will the doctor do?

The doctor will ask your child a series of questions about use of alcohol and drugs, and associated risk behaviors (such as driving under the influence or riding with other drivers who have been using drugs or alcohol). The doctor might also give a urine and/or blood test to identify drugs that are being used. This assessment will help determine the extent of a teen's drug use (if any) and whether a referral to a treatment program is necessary.



## Components of Comprehensive Drug Use Treatment

The best treatment programs provide a combination of therapies and other services to meet the needs of the individual patient.

---

## How do I find the right treatment center?

Your teen's doctor might recommend a center, but you should be sure to ask questions before choosing one. Centers should have experience with teens, and should offer medication for opioids and alcohol use disorders (See *Is There Medication that Can Help?* below.) You can also look for a treatment center online at <https://findtreatment.gov/> by simply entering your zip code. If you have difficulty navigating the site, or prefer to speak with someone on the phone, you can call the helpline and get some advice on how to proceed: 1-800-662-HELP (4357). This service is supported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and has trained call center personnel. This treatment finder allows you to search geographically and will also give you information about the treatment center, if they specialize in teens, and offer needed medication.

## What do I look for in a treatment center for this age group?

Treatment approaches must be tailored to address each patient's unique substance use patterns and related medical, psychiatric, and social problems. Some treatment centers offer outpatient treatment programs, which would allow your teen to stay in school, at least part-time. However, some adolescents do better in inpatient (residential) treatment. An addiction specialist can advise you about your best options.

NIDA has put 30 years of research into finding general principles of drug addiction that are most effective. We have just created an online publication outlining [the best treatment principles for this age group](#). You might want to have these materials handy when you talk to treatment centers to help you ask the right questions.

## Who will provide treatment to my child?

Different kinds of addiction specialists will work together in your teen's care, including doctors, nurses,

therapists, social workers, and others.

## Is there medication that can help?

Medications are currently available to treat addictions to alcohol, nicotine, and opioids (heroin and prescription pain relievers), and the treatment team might recommend one of those medicines. There are also medicines to treat mental health conditions (such as depression) that might be contributing to the addiction. In addition, medication is sometimes prescribed to help with the symptoms associated with drug withdrawal. When medication is available, it can be combined with behavioral therapy to ensure success for most patients. Some treatment centers follow the philosophy that they should not treat a drug addiction with other drugs, but research shows that with opioid use disorders in particular, using medication is generally the most effective approach.

Read more about [what treatments are available](#).

## What kind of counseling is best for a teen or young adult?

You child's treatment provider will probably recommend counseling. Behavioral treatment (also known as "talk therapy") can help patients engage in the treatment process, change their attitudes and behaviors related to substance use, and increase healthy life skills. These treatments can also enhance the effectiveness of medications and help people stay in treatment longer.

Treatment for substance use and addiction can be delivered in many different settings using a variety of behavioral approaches. With adults, both individual therapy and group counseling settings with peers are used. However, studies suggest group therapy can be risky with a younger age group, as some participants in a group may have negative influence over the others, or even steer the conversation toward stories about having fun with drugs. Some research suggests that the most effective treatments for teens are those that involve one or more family members present. You can read more about the [different kinds of behavioral treatment options](#).

## Support Groups

## Will a support group or 12-step program help my teen?

Although they are not treatment or a substitute for treatment, self-help groups like 12-step programs can be a great source of support and encouragement while a person is in treatment, and after. The most well-known self-help groups are those affiliated with [Alcoholics Anonymous \(AA\)](#), [Narcotics Anonymous \(NA\)](#), [Cocaine Anonymous \(CA\)](#), all of which are based on the 12-step model. You can ask your treatment provider or treatment center if there are useful teen versions of these groups in your area, sometimes called *Teen-Anon*.

Most drug addiction treatment programs encourage patients to participate in a self-help group during and after formal treatment, as long as they do not discourage you from taking medications, which are a crucial part of treatment for opioid addiction and can be helpful in treating alcohol or nicotine addiction. These groups can be particularly helpful during recovery, as they are a source of ongoing communal support and encouragement to stay in recovery. Information on local meetings can be found on their websites.

Note that support groups for family members of people with addictions, like [Al-anon and Alateen](#), can also be helpful.

There are other groups in the private sector that can provide a lot of support. To find meetings in your area, contact local hospitals, treatment centers, or faith-based organizations. These organizations often coordinate support groups for substance use.

## Cost and Privacy Issues

### If my teen or young adult confides in their doctor, will I be able to find out what's going on?

If your child talks to a doctor or other medical expert, privacy laws might prevent that expert from sharing the information with you. However, you can speak to the doctor before your child's appointment and express your concerns, so the doctor knows the importance of a drug use screening in your child's situation. In addition, most health care providers that specialize in addiction treatment

can't share your information with anyone (even other providers) without your written permission. You can ask your child about signing a permission form to allow the doctor to share information with you. For more information on how private medical information is protected by law, read the [HHS information on Health Information Privacy \(HIPAA\)](#) and the [substance use confidentiality regulations \(PDF, 388KB\)](#).

In certain cases when health professionals believe your child might be a danger to themselves or to others, the provider may be able to share relevant information with family members. Here is [more information on when it is appropriate for the clinician to share protected information](#).

## How will we pay for treatment?

If your child has health insurance, it may cover substance use treatment services. Many insurance plans offer inpatient stays. When setting up appointments with treatment centers, you can ask about payment options and what insurance plans they take. They can also advise you on low-cost options.



---

The [Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator](#) provided by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration provides payment information for each of the treatment services listed, including information on sliding fee scales and payment assistance. Its ["Frequently Asked Questions"](#) section addresses cost of treatment (See the question: "Where can a person with no money and no insurance get treatment?"). In addition, you can also call the treatment helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (1-800-662-4357) or 1-800-487-4889 (TTY) to ask about treatment centers that offer low- or no-cost treatment. You can also contact your [state behavioral health agency](#)—many states offer help with payment for substance use treatment.

Note that the new The Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act ensures that co-pays, deductibles, and visit limits are generally not more restrictive for mental health and substance use disorder benefits than they are for medical and surgical benefits. The Affordable Care Act builds on this law and requires coverage of mental health and substance use disorder services as one of ten essential health benefits categories. Under the essential health benefits rule, individual and small

group health plans are required to comply with these parity regulations. For more information on the Affordable Care Act, you can call 1-800-318-2596 or go to <https://www.healthcare.gov/>.

When you research payment options, be sure you are speaking to people familiar with the new rules (old websites and pamphlets will not necessarily be accurate.)

**A note on health insurance for veterans:** If the person needing treatment is a veteran or is covered by health benefits for veterans, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) can help you find VA services near you. Visit the [VA Substance Use Disorder Program Locator](#) to do your search.

## Resources

### Are there research studies available for teens?

You can speak with your child's doctor to determine if they are a good candidate for a clinical trial.

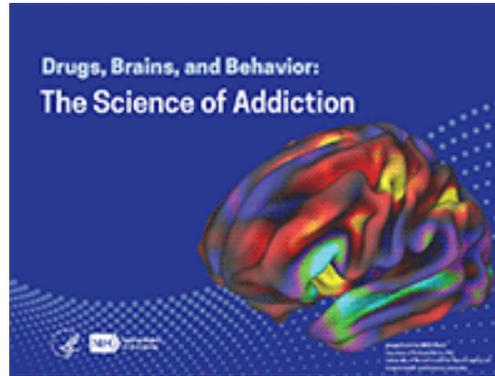
- To read some general information about being a part of NIH research studies, see [NIH Clinical Trials and You](#).
- To search for a clinical trial that might be right for your child, check out [clinicaltrials.gov](http://clinicaltrials.gov).

### Where can we find information on specific drugs?

The NIDA website has information on [specific drugs, including their effects on the body, brain, and behavior](#) and an [Easy-to-Read website](#) with information about many drugs.

In addition, you can suggest your teen review the [NIDA for Teens site](#), with age-appropriate information on a variety of drugs and drug use issues. It might be useful for your teen to check out [Scholastic e-poster that discusses the health effects of drugs](#).

## Where can I find more information on treatment and recovery?



More information on what to expect in treatment and recovery is in our publication on the science behind addiction, called [Drugs, Brains, and Behavior: The Science of Addiction](#), written by NIDA scientists based on many years of research.

There is more information on the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration's resource page on treatment, prevention, and recovery](#).

You might also want to check out the websites of some other NIH Institutes:

- [National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism](#)
  - [Treatment for Alcohol Problems: Finding and Getting Help](#)
- [National Institute of Mental Health](#)
- [National Institute of Child Health and Human Development](#)