

SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER (SUD)

Substance Use Disorder (SUD), also known as addiction, is a complex, chronic disease that affects brain function and behavior. It is characterized by uncontrolled or compulsive use of a substance despite harmful consequences. It's important to understand that people with SUD do not lack moral principles or willpower. The initial decision to use drugs may be voluntary, but repeated use leads to brain changes that make it difficult to control use and resist intense urges. These brain changes can be persistent, and addiction is considered a relapsing disease. Relapse is common but does not mean treatment doesn't work; it indicates a need for continued or adjusted treatment.²³⁴⁵

IMPORTANT FACTS

- Substance misuse is when someone uses any substance at high doses or in inappropriate situations.
- Substances can be legal like alcohol or tobacco, illegal like heroin, cocaine or controlled (prescribed).
- Substance use disorder is a diagnosable illness where repeated and prolonged use of a substance at high doses and/or high frequencies impairs health and functions requiring special treatment.¹

WHY YOUTH ARE ESPECIALLY VULNERABLE

- No single factor predicts addiction, but a combination of factors influences risk.
- Developmental stage plays a critical role: Although drug use at any age can lead to addiction, the earlier drug use begins, the more likely it is to progress to addiction.
- This is particularly problematic for teenagers because the areas of their brains that control decision-making, judgment and self-control are still developing, making them more prone to risky behaviors like trying drugs.
- Other factors include genetics accounting for about half the risk and environmental influences like peer pressure, stress, early drug exposure or parental guidance.

SIGNS OF INTOXICATION

- Drowsiness.
- Mood changes.
- Nausea or vomiting.
- Loss of appetite.
- Slowed heart rate.
- Pinpoint pupils.
- A state of euphoria.
- Odd behavior.

*Always carry NARCAN/Naloxone in the case of an overdose.¹

BY THE NUMBERS

62% of teens in 12th grade have abused alcohol.

11% of all 12 to 17 year olds in Oklahoma reported using marijuana in the last year.

15% of high schoolers reported having taken illicit or injection drugs such as cocaine, inhalants, heroin, meth-amphetamines, hallucinogens or ecstasy.

14% of students reported misusing prescription opioids.

The most common misused substances are:

- Cannabis.
- Nicotine.
- Alcohol.¹

HOW SUBSTANCES AFFECT THE BRAIN

- Most substances affect the brain's reward circuit, flooding it with dopamine and causing feelings of pleasure or euphoria. This reinforces the unhealthy behavior of taking drugs.
- With continued use, the brain adapts, leading to tolerance, where larger amounts are needed to achieve the same effect.
- Long-term use causes changes in brain functions related to judgment, decision-making, learning, memory and behavioral control. People may continue to use despite being aware of harmful outcomes.

COMMON SYMPTOMS

- **Impaired control:** Experiencing strong urges or cravings to use the substance and desiring or having failed attempts to cut down or control use.
- **Social problems:** Substance use causing a failure to complete major tasks at work, school or home, or cutting back on social, work or leisure activities.
- **Dangerous use:** Using the substance in unsafe settings or continuing to use despite knowing it causes problems.
- **Drug effects:** Developing tolerance by needing more for the same effect and experiencing withdrawal symptoms when discontinuing use.²³⁴⁵

WAYS TO SUPPORT

- Drug use and addiction are preventable. Education and outreach are key in helping young people understand the risks. Parents, teachers, and health care providers have crucial roles in prevention.
- Treatment is available and effective. Addiction is treatable and can be successfully managed, although it is generally not a cure.
- The first step is recognition of the problem. While self-referrals are encouraged, interventions by concerned friends and family often prompt treatment. A medical professional should conduct a formal assessment.
- Effective treatment often involves a combination of medication and individual or group therapy, tailored to the individual's specific needs and any co-occurring issues. Remaining in treatment for an adequate period is critical.

HOW PARENTS/ GUARDIANS CAN HELP

- Learn all you can about alcohol and drug dependence and addiction.
- Speak up and offer your support. Talk to the person about your concerns and offer to go with them to get help. The earlier addiction is treated, the better.
- Express love and concern. Focus on specific behaviors and avoid name-calling.
- Do not expect the person to change without help. Treatment, support and new coping skills are needed.
- Support recovery as an ongoing process and remain involved once they are in treatment or attending meetings.

THINGS TO AVOID

- Lectures, threats, bribes or emotional appeals, which can worsen shame and lead to isolation.
- Covering up, lying or making excuses for their behavior. Open and honest communication is vital.
- Confrontations with someone who is intoxicated, as they won't be able to have a meaningful conversation and it could escalate.
- Feeling guilty for their behavior. SUD is an illness not caused by any one person.
- Joining them in drinking or using, as it harms both them and you.²³⁴⁵

RESOURCES TO HELP

- okimready.org/overdose/
- samhsa.gov/find-help/helplines/national-helpline
- adolescenthealth.org/resources/clinical-care-resources/
- aacap.org/AACAP/Families_and_Youth/Resource_Centers/Substance_Use_Resource_Center/Home.aspx

REFERENCE

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