

A PARENT'S
GUIDE TO DRUG
ADDICTION

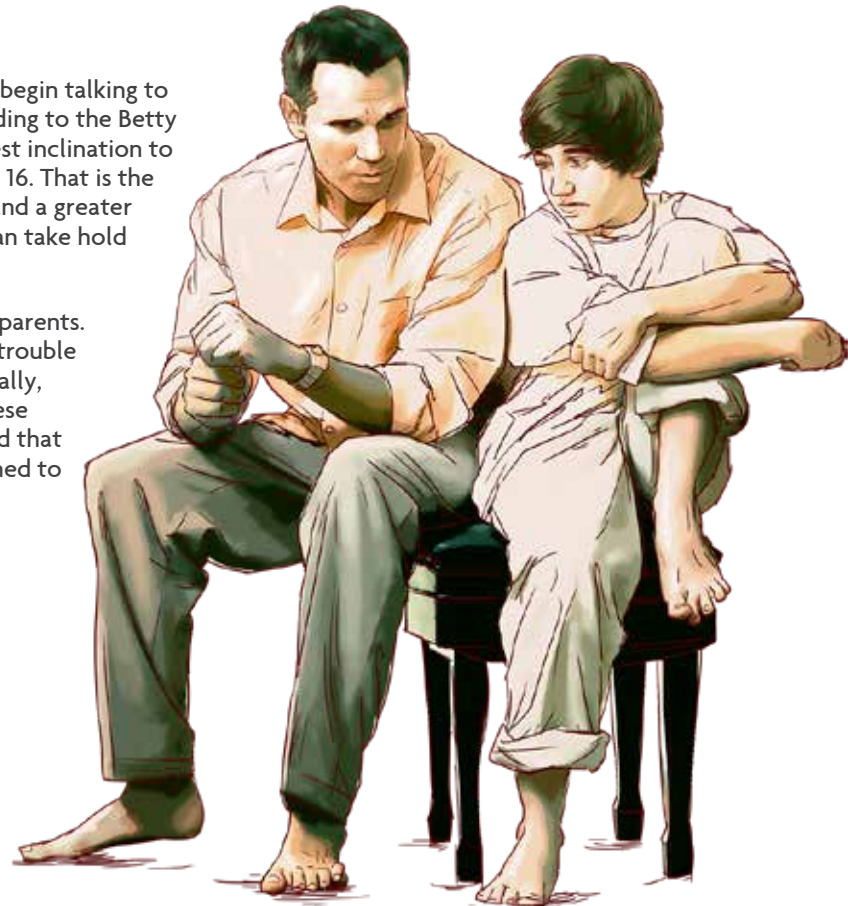
HOW TO TELL IF A CHILD IS ADDICTED

It's natural for parents to hope that their children know right from wrong. Everyone wants to assume that they've done their job in showing their kids what to avoid and how to stay away from the wrong crowd. But even in the best household, it's possible for teenagers to begin using drugs and develop addictions in secret.

HOW DOES IT HAPPEN?

The National Crime Prevention Council suggests that parents begin talking to their children about drugs and alcohol in fourth grade. According to the Betty Ford Center, it is at that very age that children have the earliest inclination to partake, with risk levels increasing until those children hit age 16. That is the most critical age due to peer pressure, heightening curiosity and a greater level of freedom provided by parents. Of course, addiction can take hold long before age 16, so parents must always be on the lookout.

A child's teenage years are particularly difficult for his or her parents. Teens are increasingly isolated and private, and parents have trouble keeping up with the changes in their children's lives. Additionally, teenagers are easily influenced by others. As they see that these things they've been warned about are actually being done, and that people are living through them, they may become more inclined to try drugs and alcohol.



WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Whether or not you think your child may have a drug problem, you should always be proactive in looking for signs. Even if things seem status quo now, that doesn't mean things won't change soon. It also doesn't mean your child isn't using drugs. Think of all of the things you hid from your parents as a teenager – kids are crafty and will do anything to keep some things hidden.

That said, there are some signs that you can look for. Some of these are synonymous with the typical teenager experience, but as time progresses, you'll be able to tell the difference between normal behavior and what's caused by other influences. Also, your teen may exhibit some of these signs, but not others, so don't wait until you see every item on this list to say something.

- Missing prescription pills or alcohol
- Unkempt personal appearance
- Burn marks on fingers
- Introduction of incense or air fresheners into bedroom
- Avoidance of eye contact
- Decrease in time spent doing homework
- Decreased interest in sports or after-school activities
- Ignoring old friends in favor of new ones
- Extreme fatigue
- Wearing long sleeves to cover track marks

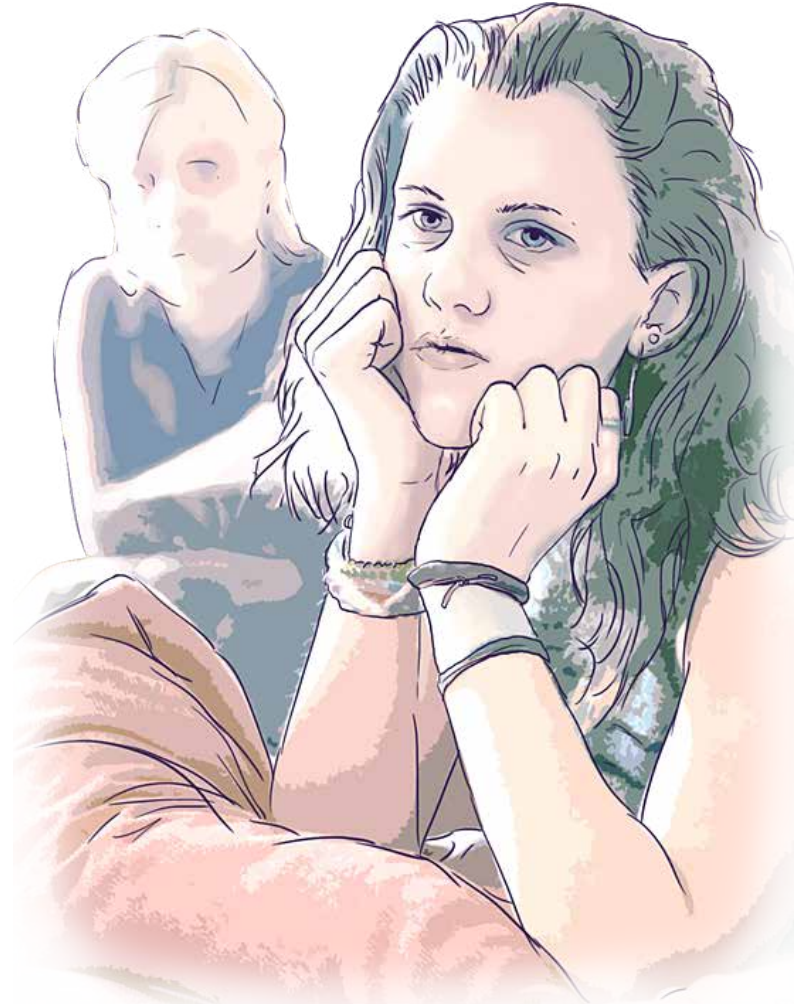


NOW WHAT?

Being a parent has always meant constant worry, and these teenage years will test your limits in this area. Therefore, it's critical to stay diligent in your search. That one moment you let up may be the moment you lose your child forever. Teenagers change constantly, so be sure to refer to this list throughout your child's teenage years and make sure there are no warning signs.

A WORD OF CAUTION

Leave no stone unturned in your search, but be careful with your assumptions. Your child may have never touched a drug in his or her life, but accusing him or her of being a drug addict may actually send them in that direction. Remember, as much as teenagers crave independence, they also don't want to disappoint their parents. You want to keep them moving away from drugs, not towards them. By framing the conversation in a prideful way and not a nagging one, you can make a world of difference and reinforce your child's anti-drug beliefs.



HOW TO FIND HELP FOR A CHILD WITH AN ADDICTION

We all want to wrap our arms around our children and protect them from the world when things don't go according to plan. Unfortunately, addiction is not something that lends itself to coddling. Your child has issues that must be dealt with correctly. An ineffective rehab lends often means relapse and further treatment, so it's best to handle things the proper way the first time.

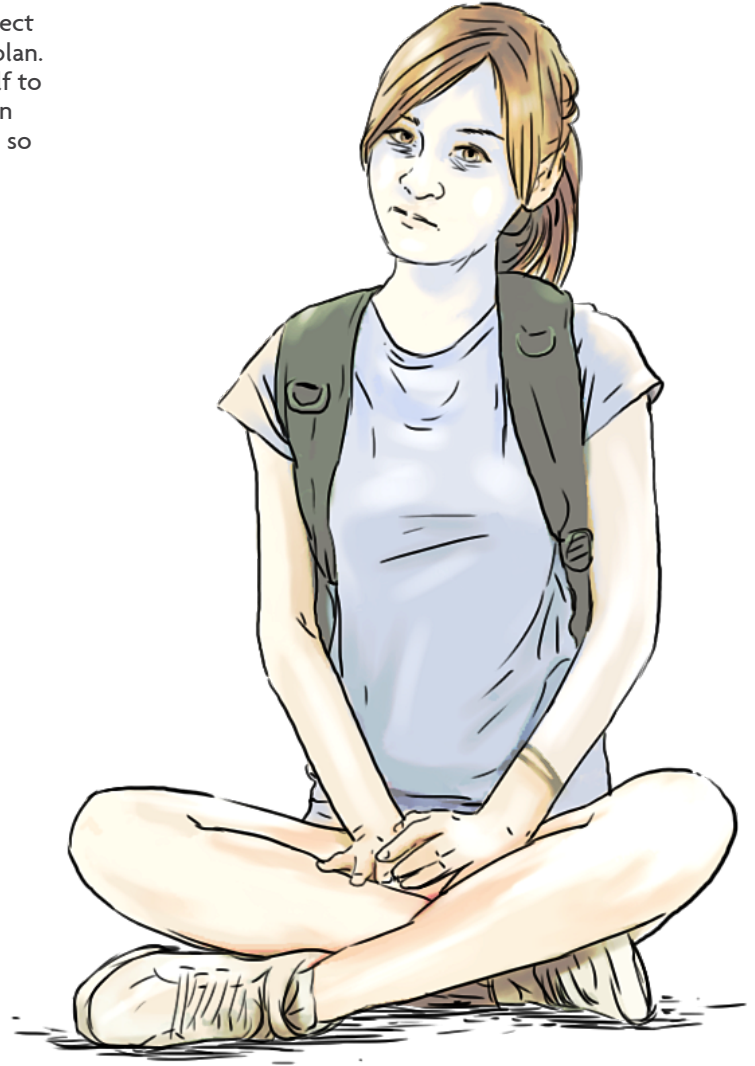
HELP YOURSELF

Before you can even think about helping your child fight his or her drug problem, it's important to spend a little time alone with your thoughts. It's natural for parents of drug users to feel as though they've failed or that they could have done more to keep their children safe. These are heavy emotions, and they are not to be taken lightly. Deal with your emotions as they come so that they don't interfere with the best interests of your child.

PRIORITIZE

After you've taken your own personal inventory of the situation, you can start to consider how you're going to help your teen get better. Remember, it's about your child, not you, and any course of treatment you choose has to work for your child. This is not the time to choose a rehab center based on something you've heard or successes others have had. It's a personal choice that should be made solely based on what will work best for your child's unique situation.

The good news is, help is all around you. No matter where you are, there is always a good rehab facility nearby. While different facilities have different specialties and services, you'll have the opportunity to explore, ask around and visit any rehab center you're considering. Below are some tips to get you started in your search.



TEEN-CENTRIC CARE

A rehab center can have a stellar reputation among adults, but still fail to help teenagers in need? Why? Because the needs of teenagers are drastically different from those of adults. Additionally, the mixture of adults and teenagers can lead to abuse and mistreatment from other people in rehab. Your child needs to focus on getting better, not being harassed by his or her peers.

Look for a rehab facility that specializes in dealing with teenagers and has other teenagers in attendance. This is one of the only ways to get assurance that your child's unique needs will be met. You'll also get peace of mind knowing that he or she is safe and is working with people that can relate to their situation.

DUAL DIAGNOSIS CARE

According to Time Magazine, half of all teens admitted to rehab for drug abuse also suffer from mental illness. This combination of addiction and psychological difficulty is known as dual diagnosis, and the theory states that the drug addiction may have been caused in part due to the psychological problem.

Dual diagnosis care is very common, but it's something worth inquiring about. A rehab facility that is not well-versed in dual diagnosis might miss a critical piece of the puzzle, one that could literally be the difference between recovery and relapse. Of course, it's always wise to remember that these diagnoses should be left up to the rehab staff and should not be made based on your own suspicions.



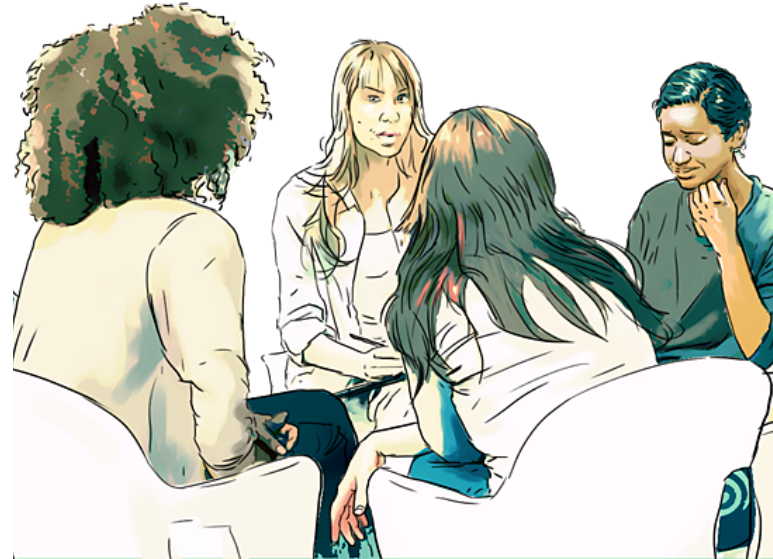
PROXIMITY

Rehabilitation isn't an individual effort. Just as your child is suffering, so too are you and your family. Although your child is the only one going off to rehab, all of you will have to heal together in order to make a fresh start. Together, you can right wrongs and provide your child with the environment that will help him or her succeed.

That's why it's not advised to send your teen off to a rehab center that's overly far away. Distance is an important part of rehab – one must be separate from temptations in order to truly heal – but placing unnecessary barriers in the way of recovery is a deterrent to healthy rehabilitation. Look for a location that gives your child the necessary space, but that allows you to visit and stay involved in their recovery.

PAYING FOR REHAB

The financial aspect of rehab is likely the last thing on your mind as you consider your child's drug problem. Still, it's something that has to be addressed at some point. Fortunately, most rehab facilities are willing to work with families as they take this major step. Most insurances are accepted at rehab, and in the event that your insurance isn't accepted, payment plans or income-sensitive fees are possible. If you find a good fit between your child and a facility, there's always a way to make the finances work.



HOW TO SUPPORT A CHILD IN DRUG ADDICTION RECOVERY

If your child has a drug problem, getting him or her into recovery is the biggest part of your job. But it isn't the only part. More than ever, it's important to be supportive and to put your child's needs ahead of all others.

LOOK IN THE MIRROR

Parents should always examine their own behavior and determine how it may impact their children. If your child is already in recovery, though, this is a great time to take a long, hard look at how you may be affecting him or her. If you or your spouse abuse any substances, this is an opportune time to kick those habits. Additionally, consider removing alcohol from your home, as a teen's experimentation with alcohol may turn them right back to drugs.

REMEMBER WHO'S IMPORTANT

You'll be an important part of rehabilitation even while your child is off getting treatment. When it's your turn to interact with your child, whether it be as part of a family therapy session or simply for a routine visit, make sure your communication is positive and focused solely on helping him or her get better. Making your child feel guilty because of his or her addiction will only make things worse. Your teen should feel that you are firmly in his or her corner, so prepare for these conversations ahead of time and accentuate the positive at all times.



PREPARING FOR LIFE AFTER TREATMENT

In a perfect world, rehab would solve all of your child's problems. He or she would come home completely healed, and you could put this behind you and move on with your lives. Unfortunately, it's not so easy. People who leave rehab and rejoin society are often very fragile and should be treated as such. It's up to you to create the proper environment that will enable your child to succeed.

Here are some ways you can help your child to thrive in this new world you'll live in together.

- Be available to talk at all times
- Provide healthy meals and water
- Encourage exercise
- Don't talk too much about recovery
- Don't expect too much from him or her
- Accept what has happened and move on together
- Do whatever is necessary to avoid triggers
- Encourage meetings and other positive activities



A WORD ABOUT RELAPSE

Again, ideally your child will never use drugs again. Sadly, the odds are against that happening. The CRC Group states that at least half of all drug addicts relapse within four years of seeking treatment. Relapse, while unwelcome, is a part of recovery. Therefore, you should plan ahead for how you'll react to a relapse.

Relapse doesn't mean that all hope is lost, and it doesn't mean that all of the lessons learned in treatment have gone away. It just means that your child had a moment of weakness, one he or she will learn from. By fostering a positive environment and maintaining a focus on the positive aspects of recovery, you can help your child turn that relapse into an isolated incident as opposed to the start of continued use.

