



## Support and resources for you and your family

A guide on substance use for parents and caregivers

**United  
Healthcare**  
Oxford



# 14.5M

Americans ages 12 and older have alcohol use disorder<sup>1</sup>

# 9.7M

people ages 12 and older misused prescription pain relievers within the past year<sup>2</sup>

# 39.9%

of 12th graders report having used illicit drugs in the past year<sup>3</sup>

## This guide is designed to help parents and caregivers

When it comes to substance use among children and teens, many questions may come to mind, including: “Is drinking just normal teenage experimentation?” “How can I get my child to talk about how they’re really feeling?”

It’s important to know that you don’t have to figure it out on your own. This guide provides resources to help parents and caregivers reach out to a child or teen. It’s never too soon to get the support you need.

## Not sure what to look for?

Here are some warning signs of substance use:<sup>4</sup>

- Change in personality
- Locking doors
- Disappearing for long periods of time
- Becoming unusually clumsy
- Change in relationships
- Trouble focusing
- Periods of high energy followed by sleeping a lot

# Risk factors for a substance use disorder

There are some factors that can increase the risk of substance use.<sup>5</sup>

## Psychological factors

**Mental health conditions** – Mental health conditions and substance use often occur together. About two-thirds of children/teens who have a substance use disorder also have mental illness.<sup>6</sup> Children who were diagnosed with trauma or a stress-related condition are at greater risk too. Being diagnosed before age 12 makes them 23% more likely to experience a substance use disorder in their teens.<sup>7</sup>

## Social factors

**Lack of social connectedness** – People who feel lonely may cope with their feelings in unhealthy ways.

**Hanging out with friends who use** – Young people often encourage their friends to use. This can make them more likely to binge drink. It can also lead to more use throughout their lives.<sup>8</sup> Binge drinking can increase medical risks, such as alcohol poisoning.

**Peer pressure and social media** – Online or in person, peer pressure can be strong. Social media can encourage use too. Posts may glamorize use. Also, some companies hire influencers to promote their products.

## Biological factors

**Genetics** – Substance use disorders are health conditions that can include biological factors. That's partly why substances can affect people in different ways. If someone has a family history of substance use disorders, their risk of developing one can increase.

## Life experiences

**Lack of a support system** – Teens who don't feel supported or who feel rejected by their parents or others may be more likely to use substances. Rejection can occur for a variety of reasons, such as a parent not accepting a child who identifies as LGBTQ+.<sup>9</sup>

**Easy access to substances** – If parents or others make substances available to kids, they may try them.

**Childhood sexual abuse** – About 1 in 7 children experience abuse or neglect.<sup>10</sup> Sexual abuse in particular increases the risk for a substance use disorder.

**Not doing well in school** – Struggling in school can be a risk factor for substance use disorder. It can also be a sign, as kids who are using alcohol and other substances may skip school or stop doing as well.<sup>11</sup>

# Healthy behaviors

While you may not be able to control these risk factors, there are ways you can encourage good health. Show your love and support, even when it's tough and stay focused on these 4 healthy behaviors:<sup>12</sup>



**Health** – Making healthy choices for physical and emotional well-being



**Purpose** – Going to school, volunteering, working or caring for others



**Home** – Having a safe, stable place to live



**Community** – Experiencing relationships built on hope, support, love and friendship

## Questions to ask a health care provider

Your child's/teen's health care provider can be an important partner in preventing or addressing substance use. While older children and teens may likely have their doctor appointments without you in the room, you can still have a conversation with their doctor.

Here are some examples of the types of questions you might want to ask:<sup>7</sup>

- My family has a history of substance use disorder and mental illness. How can I help my child if they have a similar experience?
- I think my teen is drinking. Should I be worried about this, or is this normal for teens?
- Now that marijuana became legal in my state, how do I talk about it with my kids?
- My child seems depressed lately, but they won't talk about it. What do you think I should do?



## Early intervention is key

When you notice your child/teen drinking or using drugs, take it seriously. Intervening early with any substance use or mental health symptoms may prevent things from getting worse.<sup>9</sup>

### Here are some ways to talk to your child/teen:<sup>13</sup>

**Make sure you understand the situation** – Do some research ahead of time so you know the risks to your child/teen.

**Prepare for the conversation** – While it may be hard not to show your disappointment or frustration, try to start an open conversation. Don't shame your child/teen. Stay calm, and show them you want to help.

**Set boundaries** – Have clear consequences while also using positive reinforcement.



For resources to help you prepare for the conversation, visit [drugfree.org/how-to-talk-to-your-kids-about-drugs](https://drugfree.org/how-to-talk-to-your-kids-about-drugs)

# Resources

## Shatterproof

Shatterproof is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to ending the addiction crisis in the U.S. Visit Shatterproof anytime to learn about substance use basics, prevention, treatment, recovery and more. You can also take Shatterproof's ATLAS Assessment to learn what type of treatment may be right for your child/teen.

To learn what type of treatment may be right for your child/teen, go to [treatmentatlas.org](http://treatmentatlas.org).

## Hazelden Betty Ford

Through a preferred partnership with Hazelden Betty Ford, Optum offers you and your family access to world-class support for substance use without leaving home – at no additional cost to you. Online resources include:

**Virtual family program** – This one-day online program in English or Spanish focuses on education and helps build coping skills.

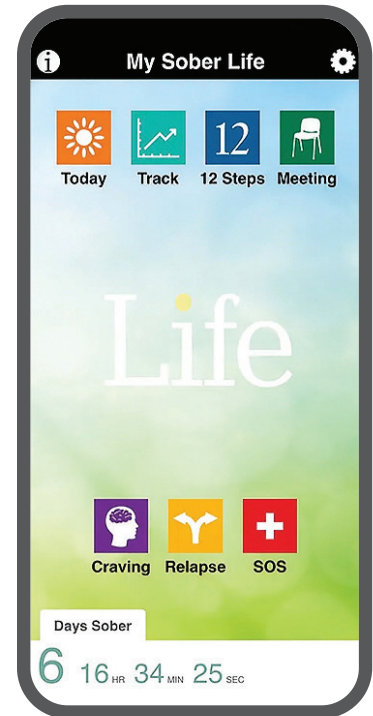
**12-step programs** – Led by popular retreat facilitators, these sessions focus on 12-step principles, including living without resentment, making amends, spiritual principles, common questions and the Serenity Prayer.

**Social communities** – With scheduled recovery meetings and chat rooms, social communities give you access to others going through recovery as well as blogs and podcasts.

**My Sober Life Pro app** – This app is designed for teens and young adults in recovery. It features a Sober Counter and tools to help prevent relapse. For a list of additional recovery apps available, visit [recoverygo.org](http://recoverygo.org).

**Connection™ program** – This program offers support for early recovery, and includes intensive, personalized coaching.

**Connection for Families** – This program offers six 30-minute sessions with a state-licensed counselor to help you learn to rebuild trust and relationships.



**My Sober Life Pro app**  
from [recoverygo.org](http://recoverygo.org)

# Resources

## Love the Kid, Hate the Disease

“Love the Kid, Hate the Disease: Lessons Learned from a Dad Dealing with His Son’s Addiction” shares one person’s journey. It’s a blog created by a parent with real-world experience. Read 12 short stories about the challenges he went through and how he became part of his son’s recovery.

Everyone’s story is unique. But this blog might help you feel that you’re not alone in your journey—and that there is hope.

Find out more at [addictionlessons.com](http://addictionlessons.com)

## SMART Recovery

SMART Recovery offers free, open meetings for anyone seeking science-based, self-empowered addiction recovery. They’re an opportunity for people to address substance use disorders for themselves or for a family member or friend they’re concerned about.

Find out more at [smartrecovery.org](http://smartrecovery.org)

## Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

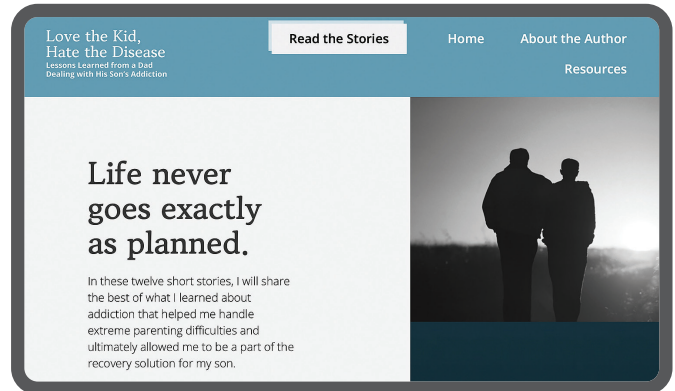
AA brings people who are dealing with alcohol use disorder together to support each other. It offers free meetings online and in-person to anyone who wants to stop drinking. The program is based on the 12 Steps. They are a set of spiritual principles.

Find out more at [aa.org](http://aa.org)

## Al-Anon

With meetings online and in person, Al-Anon offers support for people with a family member experiencing a substance use disorder. They offer an opportunity to hear from others who’ve had similar experiences and show you how to support your loved one.

Find out more at [al-anon.org](http://al-anon.org)



## Alateen

Available via mobile app, Alateen meetings are for people ages 13 to 18 who have been affected by someone else’s drinking. It’s a place to share experiences and discuss difficulties. Alateen is not for teens seeking support for their own substance use.

Find out more at [al-anon.org/newcomers/teen-corner-alateen](http://al-anon.org/newcomers/teen-corner-alateen)

## Narcotics Anonymous (NA)

NA seeks to help people recover from substance use disorder. It offers free online and in-person meetings.

Find out more at [na.org](http://na.org)

## Partnership to End Addiction

This website includes helpful information for families. Visit the “Prevention & Early Action” section. You can use the risk assessment tool and get tips for talking with kids. You can also download playbooks for parents of tweens or teens.

Find out more at [drugfree.org](http://drugfree.org)

## Get support now

If you or someone you know has concerns about substance use, get anonymous support 24/7 from an advocate who is trained in substance use care and recovery. They can help you find treatment, typically within 24 hours.

The path may be challenging at times. But it's important to stick with it.

**Recovery is possible, and your child/teen can have a healthier future.**

**Substance use disorder  
helpline 1-855-780-5955**

For additional resources, tools and information on substance use support, visit [myuhc.com/mental-health](https://myuhc.com/mental-health)

You can get help finding the care and support you need, from support groups to treatment options. Register or log in with your HealthSafe ID®.

**United  
Healthcare  
Oxford**

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This program should not be used for emergency or urgent care needs. In an emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. This program is not a substitute for a doctor's or professional's care. Consult with your clinician for specific health care needs, treatment or medication. Due to the potential for a conflict of interest, legal consultation will not be provided on issues that may involve legal action against UnitedHealthcare or its affiliates, or any entity through which the caller is receiving these services directly or indirectly (e.g., employer or health plan). This program and its components may not be available in all states or for all group sizes and are subject to change. Coverage exclusions and limitations may apply.

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