

W h a t d o I d o w h e n I s u s p e c t o r k n o w m y c h i l d u s e s d r u g s ?

A family crisis resulting from drug abuse need not be all negative. Such occurrences can bring problems into the open with an accompanying release of tensions and frustrations. Ultimately, the difficult times can bring a family closer together.

Nothing will change, however, if everyone goes back to "business as usual" once the crisis has passed. Rather, this is the time for an honest assessment of the way family members relate to each other, how problems are solved and the level of mutual respect develops for one another.

A thorough family inventory can give everyone the basis for a new start. When things have gone from bad to worse there seems to be no way out. But one person can initiate a change, stick with it and eventually influence everyone else. The key is being consistent. The following suggestions may be helpful in initiating a change:

Listen

Let your child tell the story. Ask what he or she is feeling.

Talk frankly

State the facts. Avoid moralizing, nagging, criticizing, or ridiculing to understand the child's reasons for misbehaving (attention, power, revenge). Tell how you feel. Let him know you have a policy of no drug use.

Follow through

Adolescents can be made to understand that receiving certain privileges are contingent upon execution of certain positive behavior. Parents must be consistent and follow through with appropriate discipline.

Obtain commitments

When a problem is being resolved allow the child to set the goal. Ask questions such as "What have you decided to do?" or "When do you expect to do it?" This helps teach the child to be self-reliant and be able to regulate his own behavior.

Be more consistent in your actions

By being consistent, you let your children know what to expect.

Be both firm and kind

Most parents are either firm or kind. Few are firm and kind at the same time. Your tone of voice indicates your desire to be kind while your follow-through with appropriate action indicates your firmness.

Teaching by example

Nothing is more convincing than a person who practices what he or she preaches.

Encouragement

This helps a person believe in oneself. A parent who focuses on the child's strengths and builds on his or her assets is helping the child develop an attitude of self-worth.

Be together

Parents need not be strangers to their kids. Make the time to be with them long enough to begin to understand their feelings, needs, and desires.

Keep communication lines open

Always let your children know that they need not be afraid to bring any problem to you for discussion. It is in your best interest to learn, as soon as possible, if something is going wrong. Remember, the escalation of a day-to-day situation into a full blown crisis is usually due to a failure in communication. Parents have the responsibility to create a climate that encourages communication.

Network with other parents

Call the parents of your child's friends. By joining together you may set common limits on behavior. Take a united stand against drug abuse.

Provide tools for living

Drug and alcohol prevention is really the promotion of positive skills for dealing with life. The best defense against the risk of drug and alcohol abuse is young people armed with the tools for communication, guidelines for decision-making, awareness of correct information, and the means to develop positive alternatives. Together these constitute a healthy self concept.

Steps for Dealing with someone who has a drug/alcohol problem

The process of constructive confrontation hinges on presenting the substance dependent person with the facts on his/her drinking or drugging with the aim to increase their awareness of the extent of their problem and the effects it has on the people around them. Ultimately, the aim is to get that person to agree to undergo professional treatment for their disease.

- The people involved in the confrontation process must be people who have some influence in that person's life. Example family members, employer/supervisor, religious advisor, doctor, friends etc.
- Each person involved should have a well prepared inventory of facts about the person's dependency, lifestyle and health, preferably from a first-hand perspective
- The facts should be specific, descriptive of events that have taken place, or conditions that exist and based on first-hand experience. Generalisations, hearsay and opinions should be avoided as they may increase the substance abuser's defenses
- The tone of the confrontation should remain factual, as judgements and accusations will detract from the reality of the problem
- The main evidence should be directly connected to the dependents behaviour. General evidence should only be used to support the more specific facts
- The evidence should be given in enough detail to give the dependent person an overall view of the effect of his/her substance abuse over the timeframe concerned
- The presentation of the evidence must be done in a concerned manner. The dependent person will still probably become defensive and aggressive. By allowing yourself to retaliate by getting emotional or angry, it is likely that the dependant person will become more defensive and shut-off
- Before beginning the confrontation, it is necessary that the concerned parties know what the aim of the confrontation is
- The aim of the confrontation is not to break the person down, to elicit an emotional outburst or a promise to stop abusing
- The aim of the confrontation is to show the person that: (a) You care about him/her. (b) You are negatively affected by their drinking or drugging. (c) You are concerned about the effect of the drug on that person's health, personality and lifestyle and (d) It is necessary that s/he receives professional help as soon as possible

- If the dependant person insists on stopping on his/her own, a firm commitment must be made that if his/her attempt fails, s/he will agree to professional treatment immediately.

O t h e r I m p o r t a n t I n f o r m a t i o n

Confrontation

But never while the child is under the influence. Wait until they are feeling the after-effects of their high (a hang-over). They might be much more open to an offer of help.

Discussion

Be objective, calm about your suspicions. Shouting and accusing only cause your child to tune out.

Communication

Listen. Important. The abusing child is under the influence of something stronger than they are. Address the subject of peer pressure.

Responsibility

Children must be made to understand they are responsible for their actions while under the influence. (Example: if they wreck the car they must pay for repairs.)

Face it

Admit that your child has a problem. Get help immediately.

Take charge

Try not to fly off the handle. Ranting and raving can cause a retreat to drugs.

Be a rock

Your kids are not lacking in character or backbone – they are out of control. Your child is not the person you once knew. Understanding and firm assistance are needed now more than ever.

A s s e s s i n g a d d i c t i o n a n d d e t e r m i n i n g l e v e l s o f c a r e

When assessing whether or not someone has a drug problem, treatment professionals are best to help to determine to what degree or if at all a person has a drug or alcohol dependence that deserves professional treatment. It is important that a full assessment be taken by a trained and qualified counselor.

While most people have a very firm belief in what deems use, misuse and abuse, the lines are very clear and are best determined when a full client history is taken. The sociological background, psychological makeup, educational and work history, family and marriage difficulties and medical issues all have to be taken into account and weighed carefully against specific criteria that determine the prevalence of a chemical dependency problem.