

You cannot make your teenager stop using drugs or drinking alcohol. There are things you can do, however, which will help you to cope with the situation much better.

Drug and Alcohol Use - What can parents do?

Sometimes people that we love make choices we wish they didn't.

No-one can make another person stop using drugs or alcohol. Your child must make that decision for themselves.

Many young people try drugs and drinking in their teenage years. For most young people this will not become a serious problem. But unfortunately for some it does.

Reasons for Drug or Alcohol Problems

Sometimes young people develop a problem with drug or alcohol use when:

- Other members of their family use drugs or alcohol heavily and the young person thinks this is a normal way to cope with problems.
- They are mixing with other young people who have serious drug or alcohol problems and want to feel part of the group.
- They have serious problems they are trying to cope with such as depression, anxiety or deep sadness in their lives and use drugs or alcohol to help with the pain.

What problem?

Young people who use drugs will often say they don't have a 'problem' and that their drug or alcohol use is under control.

In some cases this may be true, but in others cases parents are right to be worried. It is often only when a young person is in trouble with the police or becomes sick because of their drug or alcohol use, that they will admit they have a 'problem'.

Try to talk calmly to your child about your fears; find out what it is they like and don't like about using drugs or alcohol and how frequently they are using.

Safe Drug and Alcohol Use

If your child has started experimenting with drugs, it is important to make sure they know how to use drugs or alcohol safely.

Many parents find it difficult to talk to their children about these issues, particularly if they strongly disapprove of their behaviour.

But if your teenager is using drugs then they need to know about how to avoid overdose or infection.

Give them brochures about safe drug and alcohol use. Encourage your child to speak to their doctor about their use.

If things are getting out of control

If your child is drug or alcohol dependent their behaviour will change. You might notice they are:

- getting angry a lot.
- losing interest in things that used to be important to them.
- stealing things.
- not looking after themselves anymore.
- bringing other people home who also use drugs or are drinking heavily.

You might be worried about your other children and how this is all affecting them. If these things are happening it is important to set rules for your home and do everything you can to make sure your young person respects them.

The rules might be:

- They can't come into the house if they have been drinking or using drugs heavily.
- They can't bring other people home who have been drinking or using drugs.
- No angry behaviour in your home.

Choose a time to talk calmly with your child about what the rules will be and what will happen if they are broken (see: **Dealing with Conflict**).

Strong Bonds Fact Sheet:

Parents : Drug and Alcohol Use – What can parents do?

When you are asked for help

When you are angry and hurt it is hard to listen and be helpful. If you can, try to put your feelings to one side and remember that it is important that your child feels he/she can still come to you for help. It may be a big step for them and a good opportunity to try and change things for the better.

Encourage your child by helping them to work things out for themselves. They need to learn to take responsibility. They also need to make things happen for themselves.

Work together

When a child is using drugs parents often want to deal with the situation differently.

One wants to be tough and the other wants to be gentle.

Try to agree on the right approach with your child. It will make things much easier if your child hears the same message.

Get advice from people you trust

Sometimes it is hard to share these problems with others. Fear of the shame it might bring on the whole family can get in the way. But getting good advice is important.

Ask at your doctor or local council for the name of a counsellor that has experience in dealing with drug and alcohol problems.

Counsellors are obliged to keep information about your family problems confidential.

If you feel ok talking about your child's problems with other parents, they can sometimes be a good support. Or talk to elders that you trust and respect.

Always look after yourself too

It is normal to try to fix your child's problems. Often your life gets put on hold while you try to manage your child's. But remember drug and alcohol problems take a long time to fix. You and the rest of the family need to keep well too.

- Talk to your healer, doctor or health worker about your health and problems.
- Learn to relax.
- Try prayer, yoga or meditation.
- Spend time with friends or relatives who are kind and helpful.

- Build good things into your life.

Remember other family members

Other children in the family may feel resentful of the problem child:

- Causing stress for everyone.
- Being selfish.
- Needing too much time and attention.
- Causing too much worry and anxiety
- Requiring too much help or money.

Other children may feel angry and think that parents are not doing enough to fix the problem.

Sometimes brothers and sisters try to be a parent to the young person too. Sometimes they might misbehave to get more attention from parents.

Remember every family member needs care and attention

- Reward good behaviour.
- Try to give equal attention and care to everyone.
- If you are too busy, think of other trusted friends and family who can pay special attention to the rest of your family.

Taking a Break

You might have to ask your young person to leave home for a while if they are breaking the family rules and you feel the rest of the family is in danger. Sometimes having a break from each other can have good outcomes.

But this should only be tried when everything else has failed. Stay in touch and still care, even if you are not together in the same house.

Having good family support can protect your child from serious drug and alcohol use and also help them to recover.

→ Related Fact Sheets

- Drug and Alcohol Treatment
- Mental Health Problems
- What Are Complex Problems?
- Dealing with Conflict

Strong Bonds Fact Sheet:

Parents : Drug and Alcohol Use – What can parents do?

→ Tips from this Fact Sheet

- There is no easy way to help your child stop using drugs or alcohol if they are dependent on them. They must make the decision for themselves.
- There is often a lot of fear about giving up drug use when it has become an important part of a young person's life.
- When a child is using drugs, often parents want to handle the situation differently. One wants to be tough and the other wants to be gentle. Try to agree on the right approach with your child.
- Always look after yourself too. You and the rest of your family need to keep well.

→ Useful resources

Health Information

The following website provides links to information about the effects of drug and alcohol use in many different languages:
http://www.health.qld.gov.au/multicultural/public/Alcohol_drugs.asp

DirectLine

24-hour counselling, advice and referral for drug and alcohol problems
Tel 1800 888 236

Strong Bonds

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