

# Dealing with a Drug or Alcohol Problem as a Family

Recognizing and dealing with a drug or alcohol problem will undoubtedly require the entire family's attention and participation in solving the crisis. This is a time for families to band together without judgment and work toward the best solution for the entire family. At this point, everyone's emotions are certainly high. The family unit has most likely already experienced disruption by the behavior of the substance-using teen. Some family members will most likely be very angry with the user's behavior. The goal here is to gather the forces to acknowledge the problem, address the problem, and work toward a solution for the entire family.

## Acknowledge the problem.

This is the time to speak with key family members and let them know that your teen has a drug problem. Be honest, open, and simple in your approach. There is no need to go into extraordinary detail: a straightforward statement of the problem is sufficient. Be clear on what you need from them: support, understanding, a non-judgmental attitude, as well as any other specifics you think are necessary to get your point across.

## Assess the problem.

The goal here is to find out what your options are. Does your teen need help from a professional? Is there a trusted teacher, school counselor, family doctor, or faith leader that you can turn to for advice? Should your teen go to a treatment center? What resources do you need to ensure that your teen stops using drugs or alcohol? Are you aware of the resources in your community such as drug prevention coalitions? Be sure that your assessment of the problem includes checking in at several points to ensure that you are not covering it up and denying its existence.

## Work toward a solution.

This is where you make a plan of action. You have gathered the information and recognize you have a problem; you have learned how to handle the problem; now you must decide on an action plan that works for you and your family. Put your plan in writing—it will help you in the future to be clear about the direction you are taking. Engage your child in developing the plan. Help your teen become responsible for his or her actions by participating in the rule-making process. Many families develop a contract that both parents and children sign. The symbolism of signing a contract gives both parties a heightened sense of commitment to the process.

## Help for Divorced or Single Parents

If you are a parent who is single, divorced, or separated, raising your teenager may bring additional challenges. If you know or suspect that your teenager is using drugs, you may want to reach out to your extended family and friends for help with this problem. Although difficult, you may also need to talk with your ex-spouse, or the child's parent, in order to create a consistent plan for establishing and enforcing a no-tolerance drug policy.

Firmly and warmly make it very clear that he or she will not tolerate drug or alcohol use by your teen. Identify the consequences if he or she does use. All parents find it hard to set and enforce rules, but it's particularly hard for single parents who are hesitant and don't want to disrupt the balance of the relationship with their teen. For these parents, it might help to commiserate with your teen. For example you could say, I know it's difficult that I have to make these rules. But I wouldn't be a good parent if I didn't take care of and protect your safety.

Also remember to be available to listen if your teen is having difficulties dealing with your divorce. Use consistent discipline in your home and attempt to communicate with your child's father or mother in order to continue to enforce the same rules in both households. Make clear rules about curfews and be consistent about asking your teen which friends he or she is hanging out with. Be particularly attentive about knowing where your teenager is after school, especially if you are working long hours. Lastly, continue to help your child grow his or her relationships with grandparents, cousins, uncles, and aunts in order for him or her to have valuable role models besides yourself.

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Office of National Drug Control Policy, TheAntiDrug.com, National Youth Anti-Drug Media Campaign. (n.d.). *Dealing with the problem as a family*. Retrieved June 21, 2016, from <http://www.theantidrug.com>