



The Connection Between Substance Use and Mental Health

Substance use and mental health are deeply intertwined, creating a destructive cycle that can be challenging to break. Nearly 38% of adults with substance use disorders also have mental illnesses, and 18% of adults with mental illnesses also have substance use disorders. This means that about half of people who experience a mental illness will also experience a substance use disorder, and vice versa. Addiction often develops gradually, making early warning signs easy to miss. When substance use impairs health or responsibilities, it may indicate the presence of a substance use disorder (SUD).

The Link

SUDs often coexist with mental health issues like anxiety and depression. This relationship goes both ways — mental health problems can lead to substance misuse as self-medication, while certain substances can trigger mental illness symptoms. Both share underlying causes, such as brain composition changes, genetic vulnerabilities, and stress or trauma.

Recognizing When It Becomes a Problem

Excessive substance use can adversely affect all aspects of life. Warning signs that professional help may be needed include:

- Decline in performance at work or school
- Slurred speech or inappropriate emotional responses
- Neglecting responsibilities and engaging in risky behavior
- Significant weight changes
- Severe dental issues
- Dilated or constricted pupils or eyes that look red or glassy
- Redness around the nose and mouth from inhalants
- Open sores on the face and arms
- Agitation, rapid speech, tremors, paranoia or aggressiveness



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National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

LCT00153-20240903

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Supporting Spouses, Family Members and Friends

Substance use affects the circle of people surrounding the user. Approaching the topic with empathy and understanding is crucial when addressing it with spouses, family members and friends. When discussing substance use with family members, it's important to foster a supportive and non-judgmental environment by:

- Choosing the Right Time and Place:** Find a private, distraction-free setting.
- Expressing Concern, Not Blame:** Use “I” statements to communicate concern.
- Providing Information:** Share information about risks and consequences.
- Offering Support:** Make it clear you are there to support their recovery journey.

Talking to a friend about substance abuse requires care and honesty. Consider these tips to guide the conversation:

- Be Direct but Compassionate:** Approach with honesty and empathy.
- Share Observations:** Gently share specific concerns.
- Listen Actively:** Allow them to express their feelings without interruption.
- Encourage Professional Help:** Suggest seeking help and offer assistance in finding available treatment resources.

Addressing substance use with a spouse is particularly delicate, as it directly impacts the relationship. When approaching the conversation, remember to:

- Prepare Yourself Emotionally:** Be calm and stable before the discussion.
- Use Non-Confrontational Language:** Avoid accusations and use supportive language.
- Focus on Solutions:** Emphasize seeking help together and offer participation in counseling.
- Be Patient and Persistent:** Understand that change takes time and requires consistent support.

Addressing Substance Use in the Workplace

Recognizing and addressing substance use at work can be challenging, but being aware of the signs can help you offer timely assistance. Here are some tips:

- Recognize Symptoms:** You may notice a smell of the substance, increased aggression or talking, lateness/ absences, or frequent mistakes.
- Lead with Empathy, but Adhere to Company Policy:** Choose a private setting, focus on performance changes with concern, and inform them about resources like their Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

#SupportSobriety

If you or someone you know is struggling with substance use or addiction, call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Helpline at 1-800-662-4357.

