



Substance Use Prevention Toolkit | *Article*

The Connection Between Substance Use and Mental Health

Substance use and mental health are closely connected. A person who struggles with one may also struggle with the other. For example, someone with anxiety or depression may turn to drugs or alcohol to cope. At the same time, substance use can make mental health problems worse or even cause new ones.

Because these issues can affect each other, it is important to recognize the signs and get help as early as possible.

When Does Substance Use Become a Problem?

Substance use can affect a person's health, relationships, school, work and daily life. Sometimes the warning signs are easy to miss because problems often develop slowly.

Signs that someone may need professional help include:

- Trouble keeping up with work or school
- Slurred speech or unusual emotional reactions
- Ignoring responsibilities
- Taking dangerous risks
- Major changes in weight
- Serious dental problems
- Eyes that are very red, glassy, or have very large or very small pupils
- Redness around the nose or mouth
- Sores on the face, hands or arms
- Unusual anger, nervousness, fast talking or suspicious behavior

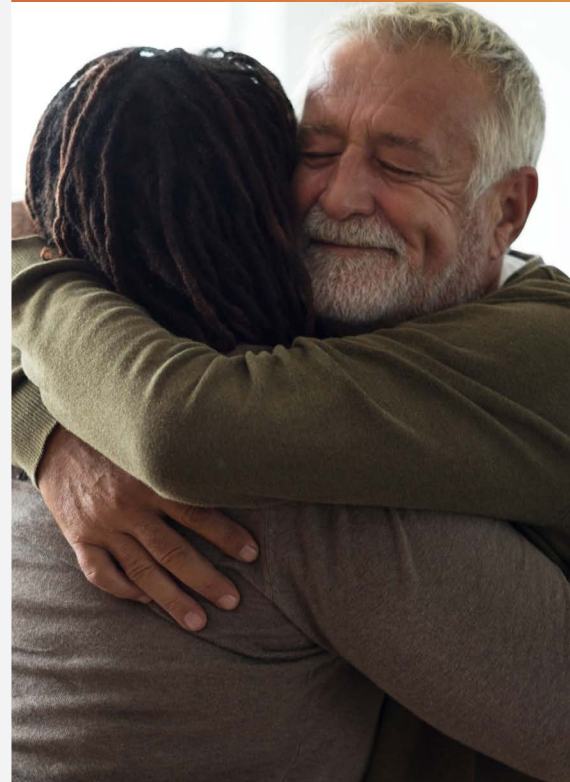
If these signs are affecting daily life, it may be time to seek help.

Supporting a Family Member

When talking with a family member about substance use, try to be calm, supportive and respectful. **Here are some tips:**

- Choose a private place without distractions.
- Share your concerns without blaming or judging.
- Use statements such as, "I am worried about you."
- Share information about how substance use may affect health and daily life.
- Let them know you are willing to support them if they decide to get help.

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About half of people who experience a mental illness will also experience a substance use disorder, and vice versa.

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

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Supporting a Friend

Talking with a friend about substance use can feel uncomfortable, but your support can make a difference. Try these approaches:

- Be honest, kind and respectful.
- Share specific things you have noticed that concern you.
- Listen carefully without interrupting.
- Encourage them to seek professional help.
- Offer to help them find treatment or support resources.

Talking With a Spouse or Partner

Substance use can put stress on a relationship. If you are concerned about a spouse or partner, try to approach the conversation with care.

- Take time to calm down before talking.
- Avoid blaming or accusing them.
- Focus on finding solutions together.
- Encourage counseling or other professional support.
- Be patient. Change often takes time.

Addressing Substance Use at Work

It can be difficult to recognize substance use problems in the workplace. Some signs may include:

- Frequent lateness or absences
- More mistakes than usual
- Sudden changes in mood or behavior
- Increased anger or conflict with others
- A noticeable smell of alcohol or other substances

If you are in a position to help, speak with the person in a private setting. Focus on changes you have observed rather than making accusations. You can also remind them about available support programs, such as an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), if your workplace offers one.

Remember

Substance use and mental health challenges can affect anyone. Recovery is possible, and help is available. A caring conversation, support from loved ones and professional treatment can make a meaningful difference.

#SupportSobriety #RealRecovery

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.

Reviewed by Medical Director, Doctor of Medicine.

