

Talking to Teens about Addiction

Frequently family members think that their child may not have an alcohol or drug problem. Another issue may be, how could this have happened to our family? We are good parents and love our children. There is no single answer for parents that struggle with an addicted teenager.

Drugs and alcohol kill the pain of an ordinary mundane life; they destroy the physical and emotional pain by changing the addict's perception of reality. Drugs and alcohol make the drug addict or alcoholic numb to the pain, unhappiness, or hopelessness that their life has become.

A common definition of addiction is, "The loss of control and compulsive use of mind-altering chemicals coupled with the inability to stop the use of the fact that such use is causing problems with one's life. Addiction can be physical and/or psychological dependence of a chemical substance." If you are not sure that your teenager is in this category, the following tips can be used for reaching out to a young person you think may have a problem.

1. Trust your instincts. If you feel that a member of your family is in trouble, there is probably a reason you feel this way. This is not wrong; it only shows that you are concerned.
2. Timing is important. Find a safe time where you can talk freely with your teenager.
3. Don't be afraid to be open-minded and honest. This is what family unity is all about.
4. Talk about how you feel. You may be worried, scared, and frightened. When you talk to your teen, try not to be judgmental or angry because your child will probably have a defensive reaction.
5. Talk about what you have personally observed. Instead of making judgments or discussing rumors, seek the truth.

If someone you love has an addiction problem, using these tips can provide you with facts about how to proceed. You will have taken the first step in helping your family deal with these difficult behaviors. The sooner you get help, the more rapidly your teenager will be able to start making positive changes.

Often those closest to and alcoholic/addict find it the hardest to see and admit that their child could possibly have an addiction problem. In their eagerness to deny the depth of the problem, they may for a time believe the addict when they promise to change. As the promises continue to be broken those living with the addict finally must acknowledge the truth.

This is the point that a desperate search for a solution begins. Help your teen by finding out the truth about addiction and the detrimental effects it is having on your entire family. Only by acknowledging that there is a problem can you finally begin an earnest search for the help that your family needs to heal and recover from the ravages of addiction. Don't give up; if your first attempt to help your child doesn't have the desired effect that you have hoped for, don't be discouraged. Try a different approach and find help from a professional who specializes in serving youth to make meaningful choices. Help is sometimes only a phone call away, so please find help.

References:

Family Echo Treatment Center Malibu. "Drug Addiction and Drug Abuse." August 21, 2005.
<http://www.echomaibu.com/family.htm>

See H. Abadinsky, *Drug Abuse* (1989); H. T. Milhorn, Jr., *Chemical Dependence* (1990); D. Baum, *Smoke and Mirrors: The War on Drugs and the Politics of Failure* (1996); M. Massing, *The Fix* (1998); J. Jonnes, *Hepcats, Narcs, and Pipe Dreams: A History of America's Romance with Illegal Drugs* (1999); publications of the Drugs & Crime Data Center and Clearinghouse, the Bureau of Justice Statistics Clearinghouse, and the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information.
<http://www.factmonster.com/ce6/sci/A0816135.html>