

Teen mental health and substance use

Finding support for co-occurring conditions



18.7% of people ages 12 to 17 had either a substance use disorder or a major depressive episode in the past year.¹

60%-70% of adolescents who experience a substance use disorder also experience mental illness.²

While **7.8% of people** ages 12 and older need substance use treatment, **only 1.5% receive it.**¹

If you have a child or teen who is experiencing a substance use disorder, there's a good chance they also have a mental illness. About two-thirds do.² It's called a co-occurring disorder, which means that two health issues are happening at the same time. There are a few reasons they often occur together:³

- People with a mental health disorder may try to self-medicate with alcohol or drugs.
- Some substances can cause a person to experience symptom(s) of a mental health disorder.

- Mental health and substance use disorders share some causes, such as early exposure to stress or trauma, genetic likelihood and changes in the brain.

It's important to know that a substance use disorder is a disease. It can happen to anyone, and it doesn't mean the person experiencing it is bad or weak.

Help is available

The most important thing to know is that you don't have to go through this alone. Support is available – for you and your loved one. Sign in to [liveandworkwell.com](https://www.liveandworkwell.com) to view Substance Use Support Resources and learn about the full range of benefits available to you. Register with your HealthSafe ID or browse as a guest with your company access code.

Start the conversation

It may seem uncomfortable to bring up the topic of mental health and substance use. You may worry that your loved one will just pull away from you or get angry. Know that talking about mental health is important, and it can help break down the stigma.

Here are a few suggestions for what to say:⁴

- “I’ve been worried about you. Can we talk? Or is there someone else you feel comfortable talking with?”
- “I can tell you’re going through something. How can I support you?”
- “You haven’t seemed like yourself lately. How can I help?”

When you do bring up the topic, be direct and make it clear that you care. Make sure you aren't judging but instead listening openly and actively.⁴ If you have a family history of mental illness or substance use disorder, talk about it. It might help your loved one feel that they aren't alone.⁵

The stock image is being used for illustrative purposes only.

1. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. [samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/reports/rpt29393/2019NSDUHFFRPDFWHTML/2019NSDUHFFR090120.htm](https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/reports/rpt29393/2019NSDUHFFRPDFWHTML/2019NSDUHFFR090120.htm). Accessed June 7, 2022.

2. Youth.gov. Co-occurring disorders. [youth.gov/youth-topics/youth-mental-health/co-occurring](https://www.youth.gov/youth-topics/youth-mental-health/co-occurring). Accessed June 8, 2022.



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Take care of yourself

Remember that helping a loved one takes time, and caring for others is stressful. Be patient, and take care of yourself along the way.⁵ From community groups to individual or family counseling, support is available.

The journey to recovery can take time and there may be setbacks along the way, but most people find their path to a healthier future. Having the right support system can make a big difference.

If you or someone you know has concerns about substance use, please call the Substance Use Disorder Helpline at **1-855-780-5955**.

3. MentalHealth.gov. Mental health and substance use co-occurring disorders. [mentalhealth.gov/what-to-look-for/mental-health-substance-use-disorders](https://www.mentalhealth.gov/what-to-look-for/mental-health-substance-use-disorders). Last updated March 10, 2022. Accessed June 8, 2022.

4. SAMHSA. Supporting a loved one dealing with mental and/or substance use disorders: Starting the conversation. [samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/starting-the-conversation-guide.pdf](https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/starting-the-conversation-guide.pdf). Accessed June 8, 2022.

5. SAMHSA. Helping a loved one dealing with mental and/or substance use disorders. [samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/samhsa_families_family_support_guide_final508.pdf](https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/samhsa_families_family_support_guide_final508.pdf). Accessed June 8, 2022.