

## How can kids build self-confidence and get past the fear that keeps them from speaking up about a parent's substance abuse?

Here are a few suggestions:

- **Find an adult to confide in.** Think of at least one older person you respect and trust, someone who understands you and makes you feel valuable. It could be a teacher, a coach, a favorite aunt or uncle, or a neighbor. Let them know about your fears, and ask them if they would be willing to help.



- **Keep a journal.** Writing down your feelings — either in a paper journal or an online blog — and recording the things that happen to you might feel scary at first, but it's a good way to work through your fears. A journal can also be a good way to remember things that have happened when you make the decision to talk to someone. If journaling isn't your thing, try expressing yourself in other ways, like recording videos, composing poems, making art, or writing songs.



- **Participate in activities that make you feel good about yourself.** Are you a fast runner? A gifted photographer? A music lover? Find the activities that make you feel confident and happy, and spend more time participating in those things.



- **Stay close to your friends.** When you're feeling embarrassed or frightened about things that are happening at home, it's tempting to isolate yourself and lie to your friends about how things are going. Don't turn your friends away in these tough times; find at least one person your age who makes you feel good about yourself, and keep in touch with them.



- **Collect emergency phone numbers.** Make a list of people you could contact in a crisis, and keep their phone numbers in a safe place. These numbers could include emergency services, teen hotlines, relatives who have helped you in the past, concerned neighbors, teachers, or anyone else you feel you could turn to if things get really bad.



- **Make a list of safe places.** If there were a crisis at home and you needed to leave, either for an afternoon break or a whole night, where could you go? Keep a list of places — the homes of friends or relatives, family shelters, teen centers, libraries, and parks — where you could go if you need relief from stress at home.



- **Remember, it's not your fault.** When you find yourself feeling guilty or upset about a parent's substance use, remind yourself that *you are not the cause of your parent's problem*. You can't control another person's substance use. You can't cure them of the disease of addiction. What you can do is build your own strength by reaching out for help. Support groups like Al-Anon and Alateen are great places to turn when you feel overwhelmed by another person's addiction.



## 7 STEPS TO TALKING WITH A PARENT ABOUT SUBSTANCE ABUSE

- 1. Write down your feelings first.** Before you approach someone about the topic of addiction, it's best to clarify your own feelings in writing. People with substance abuse problems are likely to get angry, defensive, or manipulative when they're confronted. They might yell or cry, and blame you for their problem. When you have your feelings set down in writing, you can turn back to those words when things get tough.
- 2. Get help from someone with experience in interventions.** There are a lot of professionals who have experience at talking with people who are abusing alcohol or drugs. This kind of conversation is often known as an *intervention*. You probably have someone in your life who could help you arrange an intervention: a counselor, school nurse, coach, priest, or rabbi who can help you set up a meeting with a parent or refer you to someone who can act as an intervention leader.
- 3. Ask other relatives or concerned persons to participate.** If someone in your life is abusing substances, it's likely that other people are affected too. These people might include siblings, aunts or uncles, neighbors, or employers. Any of these people could help you state your case when you talk with a parent; remember, there's strength in numbers.
- 4. Arrange a time when your parent will be sober.** When you approach a parent about drinking or drug use, it's best to talk to them when they are clearheaded and sober. Talking to someone who's high, drunk, or hungover probably will not be productive.
- 5. Keep the conversation calm.** It's hard not to get angry, upset, or emotional when you're talking with someone about the damage they're doing to themselves and to the rest of your family. But if you can stay reasonably calm and avoid outbursts of emotion, you'll be able to express your feelings more clearly, and in the end, you'll be more persuasive.
- 6. State your expectations clearly and in writing.** Before you talk with a parent about substance abuse, make sure you know what your goals and expectations are. Do you want them to go to rehab? Go to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting? You can work on these goals with the person you chose to help you in Step 2, then write them down in the form of a [recovery plan or agreement](#). Other people in your life, such as relatives, employers, or spiritual leaders, can help you set these goals.
- 7. Get help making sure your parent follows through.** People who are confronted about their substance abuse may promise to get clean and sober, and a lot of times, they mean it. But addiction is a powerful disease, and it's easy to fall back into old habits, especially where intoxicating drugs are concerned. You'll need at least one strong person to help you make sure your parent goes through with the promise to go to detox or rehab, and to follow up with them on a regular basis.