



# ADDRESSING Academic Decline



## They Can Do It, You Can Help



Addressing academic decline in a teenager with Substance Use Disorder (SUD) requires a compassionate, multi-faceted approach that considers the unique challenges they face both academically and personally. Substance use often impacts a teen's ability to concentrate, stay motivated, and meet academic demands. Below are strategies that can help support their academic recovery while managing SUD.

## Understand the Root Causes of Academic Decline

### Why It Helps

Academic challenges may stem from issues related to SUD, such as cognitive changes, social pressures, absenteeism, or emotional struggles. Identifying these specific causes allows for targeted interventions.

**Engage in open conversations with the teen about what they find challenging at school.**

**Connect with school counselors or teachers to understand how SUD has impacted their academic performance.**

**Look for signs of underlying mental health issues like anxiety or depression, which commonly co-occur with SUD.**

## Create a Realistic Academic Plan

### Why It Helps

Teens recovering from SUD benefit from an achievable, structured academic plan that emphasizes progress over perfection.

**Collaborate with teachers and school administrators to set realistic academic goals based on the teen's current capacity.**

**Break down large assignments into smaller, manageable tasks, making it easier for the teen to focus without feeling overwhelmed.**

**Consider a reduced course load or modified class schedule if full-time attendance is overwhelming.**

## Provide Academic Support and Tutoring

### Why It Helps

Many teens with SUD may have missed school days, fallen behind on coursework, or face difficulties with comprehension due to substance use. Extra support can help them catch up.

**Offer tutoring or academic assistance for specific subjects where they're struggling.**

**Look into programs within the school or community that provide one-on-one tutoring or group study sessions.**

**Encourage peer study groups to help them feel connected to their classmates in a supportive environment.**

## Involve a School Counselor or Academic Coach

### Why It Helps

School counselors and academic coaches can provide targeted support and guidance, helping the teen develop both academic and life skills.

**Schedule regular check-ins with a school counselor to monitor their academic progress and emotional well-being.**

**Encourage the counselor to help them create organizational tools, like planners or checklists, to manage assignments and deadlines.**

**Academic coaches can also teach skills such as time management and study strategies tailored to the teen's needs.**

## Encourage Extracurricular Activities / New Skills

### Why It Helps

Engaging in structured, enjoyable activities can help restore self-esteem, create positive social connections, and offer a sense of accomplishment, which may extend into academic motivation.

**Encourage participation in activities that interest them, such as sports, music, art, or community volunteering.**

**Look for low-pressure extracurriculars where they can build confidence and resilience without the added stress of academic grading.**

**Use these activities as positive reinforcement, helping them feel productive and accomplished.**

## Support Mental Health and Emotional Well-Being

### Why It Helps

Mental health challenges, often linked to SUD, can be significant contributors to academic struggles. Addressing these issues can improve focus, motivation, and overall academic performance.

**Ensure they have access to a mental health professional who specializes in adolescent addiction and recovery.**

**Practice healthy coping strategies with them, such as journaling, mindfulness, or exercise, to help them manage school-related stress.**

**Encourage them to attend support groups where they can learn from peers who have faced similar challenges.**

## Set Up a Quiet, Organized Study Space at Home

### Why It Helps

A designated, calm study space can help them develop a routine, reduce distractions, and enhance their concentration.

**Set up a study area free of distractions, like phones, gaming consoles, or loud noise.**

**Equip the space with essential study materials, such as a desk, computer, notebooks, and supplies, making it easy for them to get started.**

**Encourage a specific study schedule, ensuring the space is used consistently for schoolwork and not for other activities.**

## Recognize and Celebrate Small Wins

### Why It Helps

Positive reinforcement builds motivation and confidence, especially in teens recovering from SUD who may feel defeated or overwhelmed by setbacks.

**Celebrate small achievements, such as completing an assignment on time or improving a test score, to reinforce their efforts.**

**Consider setting up a reward system that aligns with their interests, like earning extra screen time or a special outing.**

**Use positive language and avoid harsh criticism, focusing on the teen's progress rather than solely on results.**

## Consider Alternative or Flexible Education Options

### Why It Helps

For some teens, traditional schooling may be difficult to manage during recovery. Alternative options can provide flexibility and reduce stress, making it easier for them to keep up academically.

**Explore part-time schooling, online classes, or GED programs as alternatives that may better suit their current needs.**

**Look into programs specifically designed for students with behavioral or addiction issues, as these may provide a more supportive environment.**

**Discuss with the teen the benefits of alternative schooling, ensuring that they feel comfortable with the chosen option.**

## Encourage Open Communication with Teachers

### Why It Helps

Teachers can be powerful allies in supporting a teen's academic recovery, offering accommodations or understanding that help the teen stay on track.

**Encourage the teen to communicate directly with their teachers about any struggles, absences, or special needs.**

**If the teen is uncomfortable, arrange for a parent or counselor to communicate on their behalf, explaining the situation and requesting any necessary accommodations.**

**Request periodic updates from teachers to monitor academic progress and areas for improvement.**

## Now What?



Academic decline is a common challenge for teens with SUD, but with patience, support, and strategic interventions, it can be effectively managed. By setting realistic goals, providing support, addressing mental health needs, and maintaining open communication, families and educators can help teens regain academic stability and confidence, setting them on a path to long-term success and well-being.



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