



## Motivate Someone to Get Help

It can be difficult to motivate someone to engage in healthier behaviors. Even adults (who have better executive function and understand the consequences) often have trouble motivating themselves to do many things.

Parents suddenly confronted with the realization that their child may need help with a Substance Use Disorder (SUD) will need to start by examining their own motivation.

### Are you willing to follow through?

Let's start with some essential questions:

- Do I wonder if my child has a drug or alcohol problem?
- Does he or she have additional behavioral or physical problems?
- Am I willing to accept the recommendations made by a professional?

An [assessment](#) done by an ASAP professional can guide you through the process of receiving a recommendation and starting treatment (if needed). Research the [types](#) of treatment that may be recommended. Contact your [insurance](#) company to check your benefits. Make sure you are ready to follow through if treatment is recommended.

## Continuum of Substance Use Disorder

As substance use becomes more problematic, increasing areas of a child's life become involved.

### EXPERIMENTING

Experimenting with substances would consist of trying alcohol, marijuana and/or nicotine once or twice. It would occur with peers, and not on one's own. You would observe no changes in personality, friends, legal status, or grades. Experimenters usually start their drug use around the age of 16, but experimenting with substances is not a universal experience. *By 12th grade, about 40% of teens had never tried any illicit substance (or alcohol) during their lifetime.*

### MILD SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

People with Mild SUD begin to make changes in their lives that are apparent to those around them. Drugs may be found, friends are changing, and users begin to drop out of extracurricular activities. It is easier to motivate someone to get help at this stage, before the drug use begins making extensive changes to a person's brain.

### MODERATE SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

With Moderate SUD, the adolescent's life begins to center around substance use. Getting high before school or work rapidly becomes an increasingly common behavior. As parents begin to notice a problem, their search for help replaces previous denial. While alcohol or marijuana may be the original drug of choice, this adolescent has likely begun to experiment with a variety of other substances. Getting help now is essential before your child begins to use drugs that even more negatively impact his or her life.

### SEVERE SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

An adolescent with Severe SUD is using (nearly) every day. As a result of a greater focus on substance use, she or he is underperforming in school and other areas of their life. This person's friends all use, and consequently they become less secretive about their substance abuse. At times this child will dare the parent(s) to intervene. Your adolescent may also have the mistaken belief that drugs make his or her life better, making it even more difficult to motivate them. This is when YOUR motivation to potentially save your child's life will need to kick in.

## Be Prepared to Motivate Yourself

Remember that almost no one comes to treatment willingly. Teens who say "I need help," are rare and only request help after exhausting all opportunities to continue to use drugs. As a result, resistance to treatment is common not only with substance abuse, but also with other illnesses.

SUD treatment is sometimes compared to juvenile diabetes or injuries where follow up physical therapy is required. Don't ask your child if they would like to have treatment for the SUD. You would not take their opinion into account for these other types of medical issues. You would rearrange your life to make sure they got the treatment they needed. This is no different.

Kids don't want to change. Even when the drug problem is serious, they want to see the drugs as a solution or a needed helper. They will claim that they are "self medicating," that "everyone else is doing it," or that "if you loved them you would leave them alone." Even when a child has a mental health issue like depression , anxiety, or AD(H)D treating SUD is a priority. We encourage teens to continue to receive treatment for these disorders (or to start treatment for them), while also recognizing that significant progress on these issues can not happen while a person is using substances.

Don't ever think that a person with SUD should WANT help before it can work. Most adolescents (and adults) enter treatment resistant to change. However, as treatment progresses and their minds clear from the fog of drugs and alcohol, they often begin to accept help. Most of all, to motivate someone else to change, make sure that you are ready to motivate yourself.