



When Addiction Hits Home

By Dara Jarosz, MA, SAC

Addiction is a complex disorder, characterized by a compulsive desire to use despite negative consequences. The behaviors of an addict can be self-destructive and therefore hard for people to understand, especially loved ones. When a family member is struggling with addiction, all persons within that unit are affected. This is called the Family Systems Approach to Addiction. The idea is that when you have a family, an individual cannot be understood as functioning alone. Instead, the family is an emotional unit, made up of unified parts, that functions together as a whole. Each member plays a unique and significant role within the structure.

Typically, a user's preoccupation with a substance, whether it may be the adult in the family or the adolescent, causes significant feelings of anger, isolation, fear, and guilt. Addiction works to disrupt family life while creating destructive patterns. Referred to as codependency, family members can sometimes

inadvertently enable the addict to continue using drugs by covering up, supplying money, or denying there is a problem - all out of desire to help.

If you are in a situation in which a family member is struggling with an addiction, consider the following tips.

- Don't make excuses or try to hide the addict's problem. Although it's natural to want to protect your loved one, doing so will only keep them from experiencing the negative consequences of their choices.
- Try talking to the person about your concerns when they are sober. Offer help and support before they hit rock bottom. The earlier addiction is treated, the better.
- Avoid blaming yourself.



While you can support a person towards treatment, you can't force an addict to change. Your loved one must accept personal responsibility. This is an essential step toward the road to recovery.

- Remember to always take care of yourself. Find people you can lean on for support. Neglecting your needs will not help anyone.
- Call us for caring and professional guidance.

NCADD of Middlesex County, Inc. is here helping you and your community. If someone you know has a problem with alcohol, tobacco or other drugs, we can help. Our caring and professional staff will answer your questions and provide information. Help is available for family members of those facing addiction. Your call will be kept strictly confidential.

Sources:

- Drugabuse.gov
- http://helpguide.org/mental/drug_substance_abuse_addiction_signs_effects_treatment.htm
- <http://www.genopro.com/genogram/family-systems-theory/>

TEEN DRIVING FACTS

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15- to 20-year-olds.¹ Drugs, alcohol, and driver distractions increase teens' crash risks. As teens take to the roads, parents can take action by talking about the dangers of drunk, drugged, and distracted driving. Teens are at risk—both from driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol and from riding with drivers who are under the influence.

- Thirteen percent of high school seniors reported driving under the influence of marijuana in the prior two weeks, a number nearly equivalent to those who reported driving under the influence of alcohol (14%),² despite higher prevalence of alcohol consumption among teens.³
- High school students are more likely to drink, smoke cigarettes, and smoke marijuana after earning their driver's license.⁴
- In a comprehensive study on unsafe driving by high school students, 30 percent of seniors reported driving after drinking heavily or using drugs, or riding in a car whose driver had been drinking heavily or using drugs, at least once in the prior two weeks.⁵
- After marijuana, prescription drugs are the most commonly abused illicit drug by teens.⁶ The most commonly abused prescription drugs act on systems in the brain that can lead to impaired driving ability, making them harmful to young drivers when abused and mixed with alcohol or other illicit drugs.⁷



Teen drivers admit to engaging in risky driving behaviors, which are more likely to cause crashes.

- Passengers can create many distractions for a new driver. Almost half (48%) of teens report seeing passengers drink alcohol and over one-third (38%) report seeing passengers smoke marijuana.⁸
- According to a recent survey, 36 percent of teens who own cell phones admit to texting while driving.⁹
- Even with a parent in the car, teens engage in bad driving choices, such as speeding (almost 50% of the time), talking on their cell phones while driving (about 20% of the time), and eating or drinking while driving (almost 20% of the time).¹⁰

Parents are the most important influence on their teen when it comes to risky behaviors, including substance abuse and driving.

- Despite what most parents think, teens value their advice. More than half of teens of all ages (57%) say that family, rather than friends or school, is the most important thing in their lives right now.¹¹

Teens who report having conversations with their parents about alcohol and drug use are more likely to stay drug-free, compared to teens who do not talk about substance abuse with their parents.¹²

It is recommended that parents use teachable moments, such as while watching a television program, after hearing a commercial on the radio, after passing an alcohol billboard, or even when passing a motor vehicle accident. Just having “the talk” when your teen takes their drivers test is not enough.

- Teens whose parents enforce penalties for driving law infractions are more likely than teens whose parents do not enforce penalties to wear their safety belts (89% vs. 74%); require their passengers to buckle

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HELPING A TEEN WHO IS ABUSING

Do you suspect that your child is a drug addict or alcoholic? Maybe you want to believe him when he tells you he can quit any time on his own. She may be right when she says it's just a beer and everyone does it. Your teen keeps promising that he will give up destructive friendships and make grades at school. It is entirely natural that you want to believe that as long as possible.

If you are like most parents, you will go along with your child until the substance abuse reaches a crisis such as a car accident, an unplanned pregnancy, or police involvement. Many parents allow excuses to continue until their teenagers flunk out of college, sink into the street drug sub-culture, or become full-fledged alcoholics.

According to a 2009 study by the National Center on Addiction and Alcohol Abuse at Columbia University (CASA), most chronic alcoholism begins in the early or middle teenage years, and progresses until about age thirty, when the young adult finally enters addiction treatment. Had the addiction treatment begun earlier, the chances of recovery would be much greater.

Right now, it may help you to think of your child's problem as a no-fault, physical disease. If your child had a broken leg, you would not hesitate to go to a doctor and get it set. Right now your child needs medical help for addiction, a disease that can progress into the physical deterioration of his body, cause permanent damage to his brain and other organs, and ultimately, if left untreated, result in death.

The paradox is that teenagers do not understand or care about such risks to their health or psyche. They are still in many ways like small children who live in the moment. In fact, a good part of teen addiction treatment will be educating your child to understand the physical effects of his or her disease.

Addiction is a disease that needs medical treatment for several reasons including the fact that the human brain does not fully form until age twenty five so teens who drink too much experience permanent damage to their brains and memory loss. Also, drug or alcohol abuse puts your teen at risk for sexually transmitted diseases, unplanned pregnancy, and automobile accidents.

The longer your child remains addicted, the less he will develop as a person. Adolescence is a time of rapid changes. Teens need to experiment with career choices, intimate relationships, and they need to learn to lead independent lives. The years of addiction become "lost years" when your teen put all of the tasks of young adulthood on hold. The good news is that addiction treatment works, especially if your teenager remains engaged in treatment and recovery support long term. Research shows that teenagers respond almost as well to court-ordered or parent-ordered addiction treatment as they do had they entered on their own.

There is hope. Your child can and will get better. Your teen can grow up to lead a full productive life with all the freedom and joy that living without drugs or alcohol dependence can bring.

And some more good news. The Obama administration's newly-released drug control strategy sets up five-year goals for reducing drug use and the problems associated with it. The plan will boost community-based prevention techniques and expand treatment programs.

Along with early intervention and treatment, the plan should result in an increase in prevention techniques. Education programs will be necessary to continue to help parents, teens, and others learn the dangers of drug abuse and how to stay away from them in the first place.

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up (82% vs. 64%); obey stop signs (91% vs. 60%); and use turn signals (89% vs. 76%).¹³

This article is based on information obtained from Parents. The Anti-Drug. website at www.theantidrug.com.

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- ⁸ The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and State Farm, "Driving: Through the Eyes of Teens National Teen Driver Survey," January 2007.
- ⁹ Nationwide Insurance, "DWD (Driving While Distracted) Survey." May 19, 2008. Page 3.
- ¹⁰ Students Against Destructive Decisions and Liberty Mutual Group, "Teens Today," 2006. Page 3.
- ¹¹ The TRU Study, TRU, Fall '06 Wave.
- ¹² Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2007 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, Illicit Drug Use, September 2008. Page 68.
- ¹³ Students Against Destructive Decisions and Liberty Mutual Group, "Summer Driving," 2007. Page 2.

The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD) of Middlesex County, Inc. is a private, non-profit, community-based health organization providing prevention, education, information and referral services to county residents, businesses, schools, faith-based organizations, municipal alliances, and social service agencies since 1980.

NCADD of Middlesex County, Inc.
152 Tices Lane
East Brunswick, NJ 08816
732-254-3344
www.ncadd-middlesex.org

