

Addiction Among Adolescents

Introduction

Psychiatrists, other mental health professionals, educators, and politicians are increasingly identifying the problem of substance use, drug abuse, and addiction among children and adolescents as a critical public health problem. Despite attempts to limit access to such harmful substances by young persons, the use of such substances is common among adolescents and growing in some groups.

Causes of addiction among Adolescents ?

Teenagers may be involved with legal or illegal drugs in various ways. Experimentation with drugs during adolescence is common. Unfortunately, teenagers often don't see the link between their actions today and the consequences tomorrow. They also have a tendency to feel indestructible and immune to the problems that others experience.

Adolescence is a time for trying new things. Teens use drugs for many reasons, including curiosity, peer pressure, because it feels good, to reduce stress, to feel grown up or to fit in. Individual characteristics such as the presence of early childhood disruptive behavior problems, aggressive behavior, poor academic performance, risk-taking behaviors, and favorable beliefs and attitudes about substance use, also makes the child vulnerable to addiction.

The environment may account for addiction in children. Parental or family risk factors include parental beliefs and attitudes about substance use; tolerance of substance use; lack of closeness and attachment between parent and adolescent; lack of involvement, supervision, or discipline of the adolescent; and parental substance use. Peer-related variables such as peer substance use, peer attitudes, and a greater orientation of the adolescents to peers (as opposed to their parents) are also important risk factors. Community characteristics such as low socioeconomic status, high population density, physical deterioration, and high crime are also associated with higher levels of substance use in young persons.

Who is at risk?

- Early childhood disruptive behavior problems, aggressive behavior
- Poor academic performance
- Risk-taking behaviors
- Favorable beliefs and attitudes about substance use
- Early Smoking and Alcoholism (Gateway Drugs)
- Parental beliefs and attitudes about substance use; tolerance of substance use
- Lack of closeness and attachment between parent and adolescent
- Lack of parental involvement, supervision, or discipline of the adolescent
- Addiction in parents
- Peer Pressure
- Low socioeconomic status
- High population density

What are the substances of Abuse?

Adolescents abuse a variety of drugs:

Alcohol:



Alcohol is the substance of choice for most adolescents. Alcohol intoxication is capable of causing irritability, violent behavior, feelings of depression and accidents. Longer-term, escalating levels of consumption of alcohol can produce tolerance as well as such intense adaptation of the body that cessation of use can lead to sleep disturbance and anxiety.

Tobacco:

Teens who smoke are three times more likely than nonsmokers to use alcohol, eight times more likely to use marijuana, and other major drugs.



Depressants:

These are drugs used medicinally to relieve anxiety, irritability, and tension. There is a high potential for abuse and, combined with alcohol, effects are heightened and risks are multiplied.

Heroin:

Rich students quickly graduate to the use of heroin that can be sniffed or smoked instead of injected.

Steroids:

Anabolic steroids are a group of powerful compounds closely related to the male sex hormone testosterone. It is used for bodybuilding and increasing the muscle mass.



Marijuana:

Such as Ganja, Bhang and Charas; In some cases treatment for marijuana abuse and dependence is required.

Stimulants & Club drugs:

Crack (smokeable form of cocaine), ketamine, methamphetamine, and LSD are not freely available in India and are still out of the reach of the average student in our society. However these drugs are accessible to rich and affluent students.

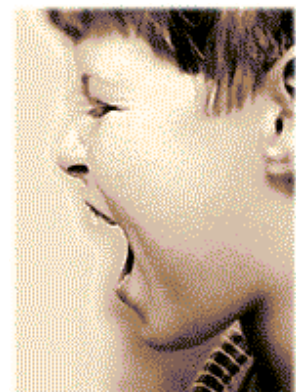


Symptoms of Teen Substance Abuse:

The most common manifestation of substance use problems in adolescents is impairment in functioning, usually interpersonal or family conflict and academic failure. Other common symptoms include a reduction in activities because of use and using more than intended and tolerance.

Physically the child complains of tiredness and fatigue. He may have repeated health complaints like lasting cough and recurrent red and glazed eyes. The parents may observe some personality changes and sudden mood changes, like irritability, irresponsible behavior, low self-esteem, poor judgment, depression, and a general lack of interest (see warning signs).

Some of the warning signs listed below can also be signs of other problems. Parents may recognize signs of trouble but should not be expected to make the diagnosis.



Warning Signs of Substance Abuse in Adolescents

- Physical Fatigue, repeated health complaints, red and glazed eyes, and a lasting cough
- Emotional Personality change, sudden mood changes, irritability, irresponsible behavior, low self-esteem, poor judgment, depression, and a general lack of interest.
- Family Starting arguments, breaking rules, or withdrawing from the family.
- School Decreased interest, negative attitude, drop in grades, many absences, truancy, and discipline problems.
- Social problems New friends who are less interested in standard home and school activities, problems with the law, and changes to less conventional styles in dress and music.

Consulting a physician to rule out physical causes of the warning signs is a good first step. This should often be followed or accompanied by a comprehensive evaluation by a psychiatrist or mental health professional.

Treatment of Drug Addiction in Adolescents

Prevention The most effective intervention for adolescent substance use is preventing the initial development of addiction. Education and counseling program in the school can help the adolescents in dealing with the curiosities related to drugs. Parents can help through early education about drugs, open communication, good role modeling, and early recognition if problems are developing.

Early recognition If there is any suspicion that there is a problem, parents must find the most appropriate intervention for their child. They should consult the psychologist/ counselor available in the school or visit their family physician. Parents are encouraged to seek consultation from a psychiatrist or mental health professional when making decisions about substance abuse treatment for children or adolescents.

Effective treatment The treatments include both medicines and counseling.



Medicines are given to manage the acute physical symptoms of withdrawal associated with stopping drug use. Medicines alone are rarely sufficient to help addicts achieve long-term abstinence. For long-term recovery, proper counseling and rehabilitation program is necessary.

Counseling (individual, family and/or group) and other behavioral therapies are critical components of effective treatment. In therapy, teens look at issues of motivation, build skills to resist drug use, replace drug-using activities with constructive and rewarding behaviors, and improve problem-solving skills. Certain other form of therapy also facilitates interpersonal relationships and the teen's ability to function in the home and community.

Duration of Treatment: Remaining in treatment for an adequate period of time is critical for treatment effectiveness and positive change. Each person is different and the amount of time in treatment will depend on his or her problems and needs. Research shows that for most individuals, the beginning of improvement begins at about 3 months into treatment. After this time, there is usually further progress toward recovery.

Recovery from addiction can be a long-term process and frequently requires multiple episodes of treatment. As with other chronic illnesses, relapses to drug use can occur during or after successful

treatment episodes. Addicted individuals may require prolonged treatment and multiple episodes of treatment to achieve long-term abstinence and fully restored functioning. Participation in self-help support programs during and following treatment often is helpful in maintaining abstinence. Parents should ask what aftercare treatment services are available for continued or future treatment.

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