



Substance Abuse

What is Substance Abuse?

The age group with the highest percentage of substance use disorders is youth (ages 15-24).¹ Substances include alcohol, illicit drugs, prescription drugs, etc. **Substance use** does not necessarily indicate a substance abuse problem but is simply the use of a substance. **Substance abuse** is the misuse of substances and becomes problematic when a person persists at the expense of family, work, friends, and other life commitments. **Substance use disorders** involve impaired control in using the substance, possibly a desire to regulate their usage, spending a lot of time seeking, using, and recovering from the use of the substance, and cravings for the substance.

Risk Factors:^{2, 3}

Males are typically more at risk for alcohol or substance abuse disorders. Other risk factors include:

- **Family:** low levels of parental involvement as a child/adolescent; controlling parenting styles; poor parent-child relationship quality; family history of substance abuse; high levels of conflict in the home.
- **Friends/Culture:** media images glorifying and promoting substance use; peer groups engaging in substance use.
- **Personal factors:** stressful life situations; previous trauma; history of physical abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect; poor coping skills; other mental health disorders; low self-esteem.

Consequences and Possible Warning Signs^{4, 5}

Over time, substance abuse changes the structure of the brain, disrupting areas responsible for pleasure, self-control, decision-making, and survival (e.g. risk/reward assessment, impulse control, etc.).ⁱⁱ Abusing substances at a younger age has greater impact on the brain. Substance abuse can cause behavioural changes; the following warning signs refer to noticeable changes in a person, and include:

Physical	Behavioural	Psychological
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bloodshot eyes or pupils larger/smaller than usual• Changes in eating or sleep patterns• Sudden change in weight• Unusual smells on breath, body, clothing• Poor personal hygiene (no longer important)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Impaired ability or failure to fulfill obligations at work, at home, etc.• Financial problems, borrowing or stealing of money• Being secretive or suspicious• Sudden changes in interests, friends, etc.• Engaging in risky behaviours (e.g. sexual activity, fights, etc.)• Abandonment or withdrawal from relationships• Neglect necessities of life in order to obtain substance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unexplained attitude or personality change• Mood swings, irritability, angry explosions• Times of hyperactivity, agitation, giddiness• Lacking motivation, lethargy, or appearing “spaced out”

How to Help Friends and Family Struggling with Substance Abuse?^{iv}

- **Talk about your concerns and offer support.** Encourage and provide assistance to your loved one to seek help (e.g. counselling, rehabilitation programs, etc.). The earlier they enter treatment, the better for them.
- **Take care of yourself.** Make sure that you are getting adequate rest, nutrition and exercise. Build your own support network and turn to professional assistance if you necessary.
- **Keep yourself safe.** Do not place yourself or your children in dangerous or risky situations. You can remain supportive without engaging in a lifestyle that puts you in harm’s way. Do not use drugs with them.
- **Do not blame yourself.** You cannot change your loved one or make choices on their behalf. Let them take responsibility for their actions. Maintain good emotional boundaries, not feeling guilty or responsible for them.
- **Maintain a stance of love and care.** Avoid threatening, bribing, punishing, or lecturing your loved one.
- **Do not make excuses** for their behaviours or try to cover up for them.
- **Avoid using emotional appeals** that may have the opposite effect of what you desire, driving your loved one to further substance use.

What does the Bible say about Substance Abuse?

Substance abuse is often a response to stressful life situations and used as a method to cope. Watching friends or family engage in destructive behaviour can be painful and scary. Substance use is a slippery slope. What was once “helpful” to reduce anxiety or improve mood becomes a compulsion. Scripture promised that a new creation can come and that old things can be left behind (II Corinthians 5:17). Christ offered hope, sharing that he was sent to “proclaim freedom to the prisoners [and] to set the oppressed free” (Luke 4:18). Christ’s promise to the world is that those who are weary and burdened may come to him for rest (Matthew 11:28).

Treatment⁶

As with many other conditions, early intervention for substance abuse is recommended. There are many different treatment options. Some of these are:

- **Motivational Interviewing:** approach concentrated on exploring motivations to change and decreasing a person’s ambivalence, improving their readiness to enter treatment and commit to change. This can be used in conjunction with other treatments.
- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy:** identifying triggers and consequences of substance use and developing coping skills to manage stresses, including social skills, assertiveness, etc.
- **Self-help or mutual help groups:** often used in conjunction with other treatments, led by people who have struggled in the same areas and provides peer support in overcoming substance abuse issues.
- **Residential treatment centres:** this provides a more structured environment where the individual is removed from their normal environment to change their patterns of behaviour and get necessary counselling.

More info

Alcoholics Anonymous (www.aa.org): support group for people with alcohol addictions

Narcotics Anonymous (www.na.org): support group for people with addictions to other narcotics

AlAnon (<http://al-anon.alateen.org/>): support group for friends and family members of those with alcohol addictions

NarAnon (www.nar-anon.org): support group for friends and family members of those with narcotics addictions

Teen Challenge (<http://www.tcsk.ca/>): faith-based residential drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre

For more information or counselling support, please contact:

Christian Counselling Services

<http://www.saskatoonccs.com/>

(306) 244-9890

chcounselling@sasktel.net

¹ Pearson, C., Janz, T., & Ali, J. (2013). *Mental and substance use disorders in Canada*. [Catalogue number 80-624-X]. Ottawa, Ont: Statistics Canada. Health Statistics Division [producer]. Statistics Canada Depository Services Program [distributor]. Retrieved January 11, 2017 from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/82-624-x/2013001/article/11855-eng.htm>

² Feinstein, E. C., Richter, L., & Foster, S. E. (2012) Addressing the critical health problem of adolescent substance use through health care, research, and public policy. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 50*, 431-436. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2011.12.033

³ Stone A. L., Becker, L. G., Huber, A. M., & Catalano, R. F. (2012). Review of risk and protective factors of substance use and problem use in emerging adulthood. *Addictive Behaviors.37*, 747-775. doi:10.1016/j.addbeh.2012.02.014

⁴ Robinson, L., Smith, M., Saisan, J., & Shubin, J. (2016). Drug Abuse and Addiction. Retrieved from <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/addiction/drug-abuse-and-addiction.htm>

⁵ Teen Challenge (n.d.) *Recognizing the symptoms: Know if your loved ones are using*. Retrieved from <http://www.teenchallenge.ca/gethelp/educationalresources/recognizingthesymptoms>

⁶ Goldstein, A. L., Vilhena-Churchill, N. (2015). "Psychology works" fact sheet: Substance abuse. Retrieved September 29, 2016 from http://www.cpa.ca/docs/File/Publications/FactSheets/PsychologyWorksFactSheet_SubstanceAbuse.pdf