



Empowering Parents To Raise Their Children To Be Substance-Free

Talk early and often about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Even when it gets tough.

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Know! The Risk Factors Associated with Drug Addiction



September is National Recovery Month. Sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Recovery Month is a time to increase awareness and understanding of mental health and substance use disorders and celebrate people living in recovery.

Over 20 million Americans are currently in recovery from addiction, which is something to celebrate! Tragically, however, more than 20 million more Americans are currently facing addiction.

Have you ever wondered why some people become addicted to alcohol and drugs, while others don't?

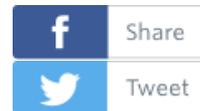
Many people believe those who are addicted to substances lack moral principles or willpower and make the conscious choice to continue to use. The truth is more complicated, however. While people may initially choose to use alcohol and other drugs, the brain changes over time from repeated drug use. These changes severely impact our kids' self-control and hinders their ability to stop using.

Just like any other disease, vulnerability to addiction is different for each person. No single factor determines if someone will become addicted to substances or not. What we do know is that the more risk factors a person has, the greater the likelihood for abuse and



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Talking regularly with youth about the dangers of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs reduces their risk of using in the first place.

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addiction. And on the flip side, the probability for substance abuse and addiction decreases in people who possess more protective factors.

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Risk factors include:

- Aggressive behavior in childhood.
- Lack of parental supervision.
- Poor social skills.
- Drug experimentation.
- Availability of drugs at school.
- Community poverty.

Protective factors include:

- Good self-control.
- Parental monitoring and support.
- Positive relationships.
- Academic know-how.
- School anti-drug policies.
- Neighborhood pride.

According to the [National Institute on Drug Abuse](#) (NIDA), risk and protective factors are further broken down as either environmental or biological. **Environmental** risk and protective factors pertain to conditions at home, school, and in the neighborhood. **Biological** risk and protective factors, meanwhile, are related to a person's genes, their stage of development, gender, ethnicity, etc.

Environmental: A child's home environment, for example, is crucial in determining risk. Children are much more likely to experience drug problems themselves if their parents or older family members abuse alcohol or drugs or are engaged in criminal behavior. Friends and peers also matter greatly, especially during adolescence. A drug-using peer can influence even those without other risk factors to try drugs for the first time. Academic failure or poor social skills can also increase a child's risk for using and becoming addicted.

Biological: According to the [National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence](#) (NCADD), a family history of drug use or addiction is the single most reliable indicator for risk of future alcohol or drug dependence. A family history of mental health problems also increases one's risk.

A person's age of first use is another critical factor in determining one's risk for addiction. The earlier the onset of drinking, smoking, or using other drugs, the greater the likelihood for addiction later in life.

It is important that parents and other caregivers **KNOW!** that **every child** is at risk for substance use. It is also important to keep in mind that family history does not determine one's destination and that awareness is the first step toward prevention.

Addiction is harmful and destructive to not only the individuals using but their family and friends as well. However, the message SAMHSA wants people to hear is that addiction is a treatable disease. Prevention works, treatment is effective, and people can and do recover.

If you, your child or other loved one is in need of help, here are some resources to get you started:

National Institute on Drug Abuse's (NIDA's) [What to Do If Your Teen or Young Adult Has a Problem with Drugs](#) provides parents of teens/young adults with information on how to identify and handle possible drug misuse situations.

National Institute on Drug Abuse's (NIDA's) [What to Do If Your Adult Friend or Loved One Has a Problem with Drugs](#) includes a list of the warning signs of drug misuse as well as resources and information to help someone who might have a drug use problem.

Sources: [National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence: Definition of Recovery](#). [National Institute on Drug Abuse: Drugs, Brains, and Behavior: The Science of Addiction](#). [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: Recovery Month Toolkit, 2018](#).