



Don't go it alone. Help is a phone call away.

Akron Children's Hospital is collaborating with the Northeast Ohio community to address the overwhelming addiction concerns we are facing. Our Addiction Services Program focuses on education, prevention, screening, care coordination, community outreach and referral to community resources.

To make an appointment with our outpatient clinic, please call **330-543-5015**. You can also speak with your child's primary care physician.

For immediate assistance, contact the United Way Help Center: **2-1-1**



This brochure is not intended as a substitute for your health professional's opinion or care. It was created in part by a donation from Fighting for Alyssa, a nonprofit that raises awareness about substance use disorder, and advocates for education and treatment.



Adolescent Substance Abuse

Educating families, Saving lives



Addiction is a brain disease that destroys lives and tears families apart.

Those who suffer can get their lives back, and Akron Children's Hospital can help.

Substance use vs. Substance abuse

Substance use during the teen years interferes with brain development, reduces academic performance and increases the risk of future use and substance use disorder.

Akron Children's helps families intervene now to help prevent the progression toward a full-blown disease. Find out the various stages of substance use, misuse and disorder.

Substance use occurs when a child consumes alcohol or uses drugs, even for the first time. Though it doesn't always lead to addiction, the risk is there every time a child uses.

Substance misuse or dependence occurs when a child uses drugs or alcohol in an excessive or harmful manner that departs from medical or social norms, or their intended purpose. Binge drinking or taking more painkillers than prescribed are examples of substance misuse. Teens who misuse alcohol or drugs encounter increased tolerance and withdrawal symptoms.

Substance use disorder is a full-blown addiction, a primary chronic disease of the brain's reward, motivation and memory system. It's defined as the inability to stop using addictive substances regardless of negative consequences.

Did You Know?

- 9 out of 10 people addicted to drugs or alcohol began using these substances before they were 18 years old.
- People who began abusing substances before age 15 are nearly 7 times more likely to develop a substance abuse problem than those who delay first use until age 21 or older.
- Every year substance abuse is delayed during the period of adolescent brain development, the risk of addiction decreases.
- Talking about substance use with your child does not increase her risk of becoming addicted. In fact, it decreases the likelihood of her progressing to a full-blown disorder.

*Source: Center on Addiction



How to talk to your adolescent about addictive substances

Parents are the most important influence on an adolescent's life. In fact, children of hands-on parents are far less likely to smoke, drink or use drugs. That's why an open, honest and trusting relationship is essential to helping your children avoid substance abuse.

The key is to talk early, often and never stop. Here are ways to encourage a conversation, without lecturing:

- Listen without interruption
- Ask open-ended questions
- Control your emotions and don't respond with anger
- Watch your tone of voice and body language
- Show respect for your child's point of view
- If you have a family history of substance abuse, be honest about it
- Focus on teaching your child on what to do, instead of what not to do



What is addiction?

Addiction is a chronic, relapsing brain disease characterized by continued use of drugs or alcohol despite harmful consequences. It's considered a brain disease because addictive substances trigger the release of chemicals (neurotransmitters), which alter the brain's structure and how it works.

These changes in the brain may be long lasting and can lead to harmful and self-destructive behaviors, causing serious damage to families, relationships, schools, workplaces and neighborhoods.



Signs your child may be using drugs

If your child starts behaving differently for no apparent reason, it could be a sign of alcohol or drug use. Look for these warning signs:

- Alcohol, smoke or other chemical odors on your child's or their friends' breath or clothing
- A change in peer group or choice of friends
- Changes or carelessness in dress or grooming
- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns, or sudden weight gain or loss
- School problems, including decline in academic performance, missing classes or skipping school, and recent discipline problems
- Loss of interest in favorite activities or hobbies
- Frequent arguments, sudden mood changes and unexplained violent actions

Types of addictive substances

Adolescents are more inclined than adults to take risks. These addictive substances are not harmless and affect a child's developing brain:

Vaping, sometimes called Juuling

E-cigarettes and other similar vaping devices contain nicotine and some of the same toxic chemicals as traditional cigarettes. Nicotine is a highly addictive drug with known health risks, and developing young brains may be more vulnerable to nicotine's effects.

Alcohol

Alcohol remains the number one drug of choice for teens, and related accidents due to this drug are the number one killer for them. Heavy drinking, which is linked to liver cancer and alcohol poisoning, impairs learning and memory far more in teens than in adults.

Prescription drugs

After alcohol and marijuana, prescription drug abuse remains the most commonly misused substance in kids 14 years and older. Prescription drug misuse can damage the heart, brain and nerves, causing a heart attack or even death. These drugs can also cause adverse changes in a child's brain, much like street drugs can.

If your child is prescribed narcotics for any reason, ask your provider these questions to help avoid addiction:

- Are non-narcotic options available?
- Can you prescribe a smaller quantity of pills?
- Exactly how should the painkiller be taken?
- Should the pill be taken even if he isn't feeling a lot of pain?
- What if the pain stops and then comes back?
- When should the painkillers be slowly decreased or stopped?
- How do I dispose of the prescription after it is no longer needed?

Cigarettes and smokeless tobacco products

The smoke inhaled from a cigarette contains more than 7,000 harmful chemicals, with more than 70 linked to cancer. Cigarettes and smokeless tobacco products both contain the addictive drug, nicotine.

Marijuana and other street drugs

Studies show kids who use marijuana are more likely to try other more harmful, addictive drugs, such as cocaine. Marijuana and other street drugs can cause long-term or even permanent adverse changes in a child's brain.

How substance use disorder affects a growing brain

Addiction causes changes in brain and body function. When basic needs are met, such as hunger and thirst, people feel pleasure because certain chemicals (neurotransmitters) in the brain are released. For an adolescent using drugs, high levels of these same chemicals are released, which may impair her willpower or cause her to lose control of her behavior.

Continued release of these chemicals causes changes in the brain systems involved with pleasure, motivation and memory. Over time, someone addicted to drugs may need the substance to feel normal again or may have intense cravings for the addictive substance and will continue to use it despite harmful consequences.

Why can't my adolescent just stop?

When addiction takes over, the addictive substance produces physical changes in the brain that are critical for judgment and behavior control, creating compulsive and destructive behaviors. These changes can leave an adolescent vulnerable to physical and environmental triggers, increasing a risk for relapse. Therefore, your child cannot just stop an addiction. He needs help.

If left untreated, the addiction can become more severe, disabling and even life-threatening. The good news is addiction can be controlled with intensive treatment and lifelong management of the disease.

