

**Alcohol and Other Drugs:**

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# **IS YOUR TEEN USING?**

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**A Guide to Substance Use  
Treatment Services for  
Massachusetts Teens**



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Executive office of Health and Human Services  
Department of Public Health  
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Dear Parent,

It may be hard to look for services when you are afraid your child might be using drugs or alcohol. Some parents may feel that their child is going through an experimental phase and want to wait it out. Other parents may feel embarrassment or shame and postpone dealing with the issue. But it's never too early to intervene, even if you suspect your child has just started experimenting.

It is often a relief when parents discover that there are youth substance abuse services available, regardless of their family's ability to pay. This booklet provides you with an overview of these services and guidance on recognizing when you should be concerned about substance use. It will also help you talk to your teen and your family about how to get your lives back on track.

We know that as a parent, you are committed to doing everything you can to help your child resolve the problems caused by substance use. We hope this booklet provides insight and practical information that will help you do just that.

Sincerely,

*Michael Botticelli*

Michael Botticelli, Director  
Bureau of Substance Abuse Services  
Massachusetts Department of Public Health

# Alcohol and Other Drugs: IS YOUR TEEN USING?

A Guide to Substance Use Treatment Services  
for Massachusetts Teens

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# 1 THE IMPORTANCE OF ACTING EARLY

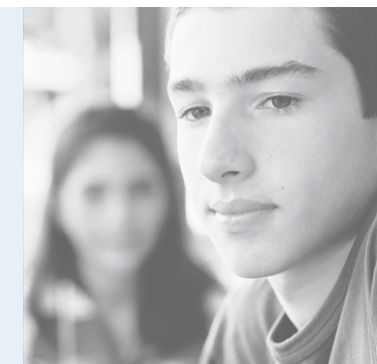
## MYTH

**“Experimenting is usually harmless. Lots of kids use alcohol or other drugs.”**

## FACT

The belief that one’s child is “just experimenting” or “will grow out of it” causes many parents to ignore warning signs that can lead to addiction or a tragic accident. If you suspect your child is using substances, it’s critical to intervene immediately.

Teens’ brains are still developing and the use of any drugs or alcohol can cause powerful damage. For kids, substance *use* and substance *abuse* can be the same. When teens use drugs or alcohol, even if you think it is experimentation, it can lead to dependence, addiction, or even accidental death. The earlier a teen starts experimenting, the greater the risk for addiction.



.....  
*“When my daughter was about 13 years old she started to smoke pot and drink alcohol. I didn’t know if she was headed for serious trouble, or just experimenting. I hoped she would grow out of it.”*

*“She didn’t take care of herself; she was tired, cranky, and very emotional. She would get upset at the mildest thing. She scowled constantly—almost never smiled. Jen went from Ritalin to OxyContin and eventually became addicted to heroin.”*

–Janet\*, mother of recovering young adult

.....  
*“I thought ‘it’s a phase, he’s experimenting.’ I worried about alcohol, pot, cocaine and all kinds of other drugs. It honestly never occurred to me that you could become addicted to over-the-counter medication.”*

–Edina\*, mother of recovering young adult

.....  
Sadly, like many teens, they didn’t grow out of it. In fact they began using more frequently and started experimenting with other drugs.

Substance abuse can happen in any family. It is important to consider whether your teen is using substances so you can act early if there’s a problem.

\* Names have been changed throughout to protect privacy.

## 2 WHERE DO I START?

### MYTH

“When it comes to finding treatment for your teen, you are pretty much on your own.”

### FACT

There are confidential ways to find the services your child needs. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health provides “person to person” services that you can contact to find appropriate care for your child.

### Talk to Your Pediatrician or Health Care Provider

If you are not sure if your child is having a health or substance use issue, your pediatrician is a great resource. Your pediatrician may refer you to other services in your area.

### Paying for Treatment

While it is true that many recovery programs are costly, Massachusetts is currently working to provide more state-funded services for families. For example, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health provides some outpatient and residential treatment programs. A sliding scale may be used to assess a family’s ability to provide support for treatment. In addition, many insurance plans are required to offer some coverage for outpatient treatment.

Call your health plan or visit their website to get the information you need to obtain an assessment of your child’s situation.



If you don’t have a health care provider call one of the helplines listed below for referral services.

### Confidential, Person-to-Person Phone Help

#### Youth Central Intake and Care Coordination (YCICC)

617-661-3991 or  
(Toll free) 866-705-2807  
TTY: 617-661-9051  
[www.healthrecovery.org](http://www.healthrecovery.org)  
Hours of operation: 9am–5pm

This state-funded service helps Massachusetts families access treatment programs specifically for teens. YCICC is a project of the Institute for Health and Recovery.

When you call YCICC, staff will refer you to the nearest Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH)-licensed outpatient provider. DPH service providers are generally affiliated with community mental health centers or hospitals.

This provider will:

- ▶ conduct a thorough assessment to determine the level of your child's substance abuse and the need for outpatient services.
- ▶ if needed, coordinate access to the state's residential substance abuse treatment programs for teens.

*"Central Intake gives parents just one number to call when they need help getting an assessment, a referral for treatment, help with their insurance company and follow-up services."*

—Maggie Giles, Director of Youth Services,  
Youth Central Intake and Care Coordination

### **The Massachusetts Substance Abuse Information and Education Helpline**


(Toll free) 1-800-327-5050

TTY: 617-536-5872

[www.helpline-online.com](http://www.helpline-online.com)

Staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

The Helpline provides free and confidential information and referral for alcohol and other drug abuse problems. Translation services are available in 140 languages. A treatment referral specialist can help you find a public or private treatment program.

 **If you get an assessment before calling your pediatrician, keep him or her updated.**



### **Words to Know**

- ▶ **Tolerance:** the need to use more of the substance in order to get the desired effect.
- ▶ **Craving:** a strong need or desire for a drug or alcohol.
- ▶ **Loss of control:** increasing use of drugs or alcohol, combined with an inability to set limits or stop using.
- ▶ **Withdrawal:** physical symptoms such as nausea, sweating, shakiness, insomnia and intense anxiety. These symptoms occur when the body develops a physical dependence on drugs or alcohol and use is stopped abruptly. Withdrawal symptoms should be assessed by a medical or treatment provider.
- ▶ **Psychological addiction:** psychological symptoms, such as depression or intense anxiety, which occur when drug or alcohol use is discontinued. It may also refer to the intense craving for alcohol or drugs.
- ▶ **Relapse:** to fall back into substance use.



# 3 KNOWING WHAT KIND OF TREATMENT IS BEST FOR MY TEEN

## MYTH

“There are no substance use treatment programs designed specifically for adolescents.”

## FACT

In Massachusetts, state funded and private programs address the residential and outpatient needs unique to young people and their families.



### Types of Treatment

Staff from an outpatient program will meet with you and your teen and will recommend a treatment plan that may include outpatient or residential services.

.....  
*“Programs for kids must be appropriate for their age level and separate from adult models. In Massachusetts, we already have outpatient and residential treatment programs for teens, as well as recovery high schools. We are moving in a direction to expand these services so we can provide integrated services to everyone in the Commonwealth who needs them.”*

—Carolyn Castro-Donlan, Director of the Office of Youth and Young Adult Services, Bureau of Substance Abuse Services, Massachusetts Department of Public Health

.....

### Outpatient Treatment

One way for a teen to resolve a substance abuse problem is through outpatient visits. This allows him or her to continue to go to school and live at home. Typically, outpatient providers will meet with your son or daughter one or more times a week. If your child’s treatment plan calls for outpatient therapy, the agency that assessed your child will often provide this.



Outpatient care may include:

- ▶ Individual therapy
- ▶ Family therapy
- ▶ Group therapy

A master's level clinician who is knowledgeable about child and adolescent development typically provides outpatient services for adolescents.

A growing number of intensive outpatient treatment programs for adolescents around Massachusetts provide comprehensive services to teens and their families.



Young people may resist residential treatment. You can explain to your child that the residential treatment programs are voluntary. A teen does not have to be enthusiastic about going, but his or her agreement is necessary. Based on the youth's treatment plan, the length of stay in residential treatment varies, but usually the stay is about 90 days.



For more information on these programs please see resources on the inside back cover.

In some cases living at home during the initial phases of recovery may not be effective, as old friends and habits may make it impossible to follow a treatment plan. If this is the case, a residential program may be recommended.

### Residential Treatment

Youth Central Intake and Care Coordination (YCICC) staff can coordinate access to adolescent residential programs funded and licensed by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

Residential treatment programs provide several types of trained staff including master's level clinicians and recovery specialists, educational coordinators, continuing care coordinators, and referrals to psychiatrists and other physicians if needed.



## Additional Support for Adolescents in Recovery

### Recovery High School

The state is sponsoring recovery high schools in several communities. Teens in recovery can now continue their education while working on recovery.



*"This a much needed service for many of the high school students in our region and we are grateful for the opportunity to assist these young people in their recovery and provide a high quality educational program leading to both proficiency and graduation."*

—Dr. Joseph P. Burke, Springfield Superintendent of Schools



### Juvenile Drug Court

Court-mandated treatment is one way the courts are addressing substance use and illegal activity. Drug courts are only offered in select cities throughout the state. Where available, these courts provide an alternative to jail and motivation for recovery.



For more information, contact the Administrative Office of the Juvenile Court at **617-788-6550**.



# 4 SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

## MYTH

*"Signs of substance use will be very clear."*

## FACT

While it's true that some signs of use are obvious, for example the smell of alcohol or marijuana, empty alcohol bottles, or red eyes, other subtle signs may also indicate substance use. Look for changes in behavior, appearance, and performance.

*"He no longer cared about showering or even the way he looked. He was up all night, sleeping all day, quitting jobs, not working anymore. I was finding strange things around the house: spoons were missing, or I'd find a spoon with burn marks on the bottom. I also found cotton balls, and filters broken off the cigarette."*

—Mary\*, mother of a son who progressed from OxyContin addiction to heroin



### Did you Know?

These conditions may increase risk for substance abuse:

- ▶ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Trauma
- ▶ Anxiety disorder
- ▶ Problems with anger

### Warning signs of adolescent substance use:

- ▶ Decline in school grades or attendance
- ▶ Change in personality, such as moodiness or extreme irritability
- ▶ Change in or neglect of appearance and hygiene
- ▶ Change in sleeping patterns, such as not sleeping followed by long periods of sleep
- ▶ Stealing money or possessions
- ▶ Loss of interest in activities that were once enjoyed
- ▶ Hanging out with older kids, or kids you don't know
- ▶ Isolation and withdrawal to the bedroom or bathroom
- ▶ Missing prescription drugs or bottles of alcohol
- ▶ Unusual trash such as rubber cement bottles and plastic bags, Q-tips, water bottle caps, broken pieces of mirror, split razors



### Learning Disabilities or Emotional Problems May Increase Risk

Experts believe that children with learning disabilities or emotional disorders are at greater risk for developing problems with substance use. Therefore, identifying and treating the emotional disorder and the substance use problem is vital for improving chances of recovery. As you work with your outpatient provider, discuss your concerns about any underlying mental health conditions your child may have. You can also speak with your pediatrician, special education teacher, guidance counselor or school social worker to get help.

Ask your provider to make sure that any mental health treatment will be coordinated with the substance abuse service. If you are concerned about your child's diagnosis, get a second opinion.



# 5 HELPING YOUR TEEN TO RECOGNIZE THE PROBLEM

## MYTH

**“Someone with a substance problem needs to hit rock bottom before agreeing to treatment.”**

## FACT

There is no need for anyone to hit rock bottom before they receive help. The earlier the teen gets help, the better the chance of stopping addiction or a fatal outcome.

### How to Talk to Your Teen about His or Her Substance Use

It can be difficult to talk to your teen about substance use. Your teen may deny problems or even the fact that he or she is using. Resistance is natural. Your teen, however, may also be feeling a loss of control or fear about his or her use but may feel a sense of relief that there is help available.

.....  
*“Anger is not the answer. Parents have to approach this in a very firm but non-angry manner.”*

.....  
–Dr. John Knight, Children’s Hospital  
.....

If you have a partner, first decide together how you will discuss these issues with your teen. It is important that both you and your partner are in agreement and present the same united message. Throughout the course of your conversation, remain non-judgmental.

## WHAT NOT TO DO ...

- ▶ Don’t use loaded or critical language; for example, avoid using words like “loser.”
- ▶ Never try to discuss substance use while your teen is high. Wait until a relatively calm moment for your discussion.
- ▶ Don’t compare your child to someone who has ruined his or her life by drinking.
- ▶ Don’t compare your child to his sibling, who might be successful and never used drugs.
- ▶ Never blame the child for problems in the family.
- ▶ Don’t interrupt your child when he is genuinely trying to describe current pain, difficulties or situations.



## DO ...

- ▶ **Tell your child how much you love him/her.** Say how worried you are about his/her recent moods and behavior. Explain how you would feel if anything ever happened to him/her.
- ▶ **Empathize; listen when he or she describes feelings, pressures and perceptions.** You can say, "That sounds so difficult," or "That must have been really painful."
- ▶ **Gently ask follow-up questions** and summarize so they know you are listening; for example, "So you're saying you are under a lot of pressure to make your friend like you."
- ▶ **Describe signs that have led you to suspect drug use.** For example you could say, "You smelled like alcohol when you came home last night," or "I found these pills on the floor." Identify symptoms of drug use that concern you; for example, "Your grades have really gone downhill lately," or "You've been sleeping an awful lot." Keep your tone very non-judgmental and calm.
- ▶ **Remind your child of his/her goals,** such as being on a sports team or getting a part in the play. Listen. Don't interrupt and don't criticize.
- ▶ **Guide your child to their own understanding** of the consequences of the use of alcohol and or other drugs. Explain that using alcohol or other drugs can have serious consequences in their lives. Teens who start using drugs and drinking are far more likely to get addicted. Ask him or her to describe the types of relationships he or she wants to have with friends and family.
- ▶ Make it clear that you and the family will **seek professional help.**

## What If My Child Still Refuses to Get an Assessment?

Schedule the assessment and plan to go with or without your son or daughter. The assessment is an opportunity for you to get advice and help on how to deal with your teen. Explain that you will talk to the counselors and if your child is not there, they will not hear his or her side of the story. Be open to the fact that your teen's decision might change.



### Steps to Take Right Away

- ▶ Set limits and clear expectations.
- ▶ Remove access to the four C's: Cash, Cars, Cell phones and Computers. All these tools can be used to obtain drugs and alcohol. Explain, "All of these things will be returned to you if you're willing to go into treatment, stop using drugs, and rebuild trust."
- ▶ If inhalants have been an issue, keep them away from your teen. If these products must be used for a practical purpose, be there to supervise.



Inhalant abuse is the intentional breathing in of gas and vapors with the goal of altering your mood. There are over 1,000 common household, school, and industrial products that can be abused, including solvents, solvent-based products, gases, fuels, and aerosols. For more information, go to [www.inhalantabusetraining.org](http://www.inhalantabusetraining.org).

# 6 HEAL YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY

## MYTH

**“If we can just fix the person who is using drugs or alcohol, everything else will get better.”**

## FACT

Substance abuse affects the whole family. Addressing substance abuse together and caring for all family members will not only help the teen, but will move the whole family towards a better place. Successfully pulling through these hardships will build the family’s strength.

Helping a child through recovery is challenging. Just as the teen in treatment needs your support, so do your other children.



For free booklets on how to protect your other children from substance abuse please visit [www.maclearinghouse.com](http://www.maclearinghouse.com) or call 1-800-952-6637. Be sure to mention the age of your child.

### Family Therapy Helps

Family therapy helps families learn how to work together during treatment. Treatment plans often include this service. Even a few visits can help family members understand each other better and relate to each other in helpful ways.

### Avoid Enabling

It is important for all members of the family to recognize the difference between “helping” and “enabling.” Enabling means you are making it possible or easier for your child to use substances. If you “enable” a child you feed the patterns of substance abuse and can make the problem worse.

## Examples of enabling

- ▶ Putting up with verbally or physically abusive behavior
- ▶ Letting your teen get away with excuses that you know are false
- ▶ Allowing your teen to constantly disregard rules you have set about curfews, cell phone use and using the car
- ▶ Paying back another child for money that was stolen
- ▶ Ignoring obvious instances of intoxication for fear of the reaction
- ▶ Calling a teen in sick to school or work when he or she is hung over
- ▶ Drinking or using marijuana or other drugs with your teen

## Connect with Support Groups

As you go through the recovery process with your teen, you may feel a sense of isolation. Attending a support group can seem like “just one more thing to do,” but the benefits of support can make a huge difference to your family. Other families who are struggling with a substance abusing teen are able to share their knowledge of effective ways to cope.

.....  
*“If a family’s child is diagnosed with cancer or diabetes, they have lots of support. People call to ask, ‘Are you okay? How’s your son?’ When addiction happens to your child, no one knows what to say to you. They don’t know what they can do to help, so you suffer in silence. And that’s why we have our group because we don’t have to suffer alone.”*

.....  
–Susan\*, mother of a recovering young adult  
.....

## Take Care of Yourself

It’s important that you take care of yourself during these trying times. When you take care of your own physical and mental well-being, you are better able to help your family heal. Here are some suggestions:

- ▶ Speak to a trusted professional counselor, or a member of the clergy.
- ▶ Maintain physical health through exercise and good nutrition.
- ▶ Make sure you keep up with your own doctors’ appointments.
- ▶ As much as possible, keep doing the activities you normally do.

## There is Hope

Helping your teen through recovery takes a lot of effort. It is important not to give up and to realize that, as parents, you are not alone. Your hope that your teen can return to a healthy, drug-free life can make all the difference.

.....  
*“Today, I woke up, I cooked myself breakfast, and I went to the gym. You know, this is just fabulous. Three years ago, this would not have crossed my mind. I couldn’t even get up to make food when I was using. So all of this is so fantastic and it just feels so good. It is such a blessing.”*

.....  
–J, Recovering addict, 3 years sober, 20 years old  
.....

.....  
*“I’m in recovery. A lot of my friends are dead, dead from overdose, dead from accidents involving drugs. Today I’m in a halfway house. We have seven AA meetings a week. We have chores to do, and I’m working in an office for a lawyer. I am glad to be alive.”*

.....  
–M, recovering addict, 10 months sober, 21 years old  
.....



# NOTES

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## Resources and Phone Numbers for Substance Use

### **Youth Central Intake and Care Coordination (YCICC)**

This special state-funded service organization helps Massachusetts parents and families access treatment programs specifically for teens. YCICC is a project of the Institute for Health and Recovery.

Hours of Operation: 9am–5pm  
617-661-3991 or  
(Toll free) 866-705-2807  
TTY: 617-661-9051  
[www.healthrecovery.org](http://www.healthrecovery.org)

### **Massachusetts Substance Abuse Information and Education Helpline**

Free and confidential information and referral for alcohol and other drug abuse problems

Staffed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week  
(Toll free) 1-800-327-5050  
TTY: 617-536-5872  
[www.helpline-online.com](http://www.helpline-online.com)

### **The Administrative Office of the Juvenile Court**

To find out if there is Juvenile Court or Drug Court in your community, call 617-788-6550.

### **Center for Adolescent Substance Abuse Research**

This Children’s Hospital program provides medical diagnosis and intervention for teens.

[www.ceasar-boston.org](http://www.ceasar-boston.org)  
617-355-2727

### **A Resource for Other Health and Social Services**

#### **Mass 2-1-1 Call Center**

A resource for finding government benefits and services, non-profit organizations, support groups, and other local resources, Mass 2-1-1 responds immediately during times of crisis. Staff will direct callers to services most appropriate for their needs.

Monday-Friday 8 a.m.–8 p.m.  
(Toll free) 1-877-211-6277, or in some areas, call 211  
TTY: 617-536-5872  
[www.mass211help.org](http://www.mass211help.org)

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