



ALCOHOL &  
OTHER DRUGS:

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# IS YOUR TEEN USING?

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A Guide to Substance Use  
Treatment Services for  
Massachusetts Teens

# Alcohol and Other Drugs: Is Your Teen Using?

A Guide to Substance Use Treatment Services  
for Massachusetts Teens

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF ACTING EARLY

If you suspect your teen is using substances, it's critical to intervene quickly. In this booklet you will find guidance on recognizing when to be concerned that your teen may be using substances, an overview of services provided by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, and tips on talking to your teen and your family about how to get your lives back on track.

**Teens' brains are still developing and the use of alcohol can cause damage.**

For teens, substance use and substance abuse can be the same. When teens use alcohol, even if you think they are experimenting, it can lead to addiction or accidents. Due to how the youth brain develops, the earlier a teen starts using alcohol, the greater the risk for developing dependence or abuse. Often, changes in behavior can signal a problem with alcohol or another drug.

If you are concerned about your teen's behavior, it is important to consider whether he or she may be using substances so you can act early to avoid future problems. Parents who reach out for help are often grateful they did.

*\* Names have been changed throughout to protect privacy. Models were used for the photos shown, and all photos are stock photography.*

“When my daughter was about 13 years old 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. (She) . . . eventually became addicted to heroin.”

— **JANET\*, MOTHER OF A RECOVERING YOUNG ADULT**

“I worried about alcohol . . . 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 A RECOVERING YOUNG ADULT**



## WHERE DO I START?

There are several confidential ways to find help if you suspect your teen may be using drugs or alcohol. Some programs mentioned are funded by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

## Talk to Your Pediatrician or Health Care Provider

If you are not sure if your teen is having a health or substance use issue, his or her doctor can assess if there is a physical concern.

## Paying for Counseling and Treatment

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health provides outpatient, detoxification, stabilization, and residential treatment programs for youth who are experiencing problems

due to substance use. A sliding scale may be used to assess a family's ability to provide support for treatment, but inability to pay will not be a barrier to services. In addition, most public and commercial health insurance plans are required to offer some coverage for outpatient treatment and may be required to cover detoxification and stabilization services in the future.

Call your health insurance plan or visit their website to get the information you need to obtain an assessment of your teen's situation. If you still have questions, you can also use the resources found on page 26.





## TAKE ACTION

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

If you just want to talk confidentially to someone, call one of the Helplines below. They also offer referral services.

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

1-617-661-3991 or  
(Toll free) 1-866-705-2807  
TTY: 1-617-661-9051  
English and Spanish  
[www.healthrecovery.org](http://www.healthrecovery.org)

**Hours of operation:** 9am–5pm  
Monday-Friday except holidays

Finding someone who can answer your questions is a big relief. Care coordinators can help you decide what might be the best choice for your family. This state-funded service also helps Massachusetts youth and families access treatment programs specifically for teens. YCICC is a project of the Institute for Health and Recovery.

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

#### These providers will:

- Conduct a thorough assessment to determine if your teen has a substance use issue and the need for outpatient services.
- If needed, coordinate access to the state's stabilization or 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, CONSULTANT, MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH, BUREAU OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES, OFFICE OF YOUTH & YOUNG ADULT SERVICES**

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

(Toll free) 1-800-327-5050  
TTY: Use MassRelay at 711  
or 1-800-720-3480

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

Staffed 7 days a week

The Helpline provides free and confidential information and referral, primarily for adults 18 and older, for alcohol and other drug abuse services. Translation services are available in 140 languages.

If you're looking for help during the evening or weekend, a Helpline

treatment referral specialist can help you find a public or private treatment program for youth or adults. Those seeking youth substance abuse information or treatment should contact YCICC (see page 7).

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

## WORDS TO KNOW

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**Tolerance:**

The need to increase the amount of alcohol or drugs used in order to get the desired effect or “high.”

**Craving:**

A strong need or desire for a drug or alcohol.

**Loss of control:**

The use of any substance more often, or in larger amounts, than intended or desired, combined with an inability to limit or stop use.

**Relapse:**

A return to use of substances after a period of being away from them.

**Withdrawal:**

Physical symptoms such as nausea, sweating, shakiness, insomnia, and intense anxiety. These symptoms occur when the person using a substance develops a physical dependence on drugs or alcohol and use is stopped abruptly. Withdrawal symptoms should be assessed by a medical or treatment provider, since withdrawal from some substances can be extremely uncomfortable and even life threatening.

**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.

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

In Massachusetts, both state-funded and private adolescent 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.

### Outpatient Treatment

One way for a teen to resolve a substance abuse problem is through outpatient services. This allows them to continue to go to school and live at home. Typically, outpatient providers will meet with your son or daughter at least once a week. If their treatment plan calls for outpatient therapy, the agency that assessed your teen 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 in Massachusetts provide comprehensive services to teens and their families.

“Programs for kids must be appropriate for their age level and separate from adult models. In Massachusetts, we already have outpatient, stabilization, 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.”

— JEN TRACEY, DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT SERVICES, BUREAU OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES, MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

### **Detoxification and Stabilization**

These services are for youth aged 13 to 17 needing medical, psychological, and behavioral stabilization from substance abuse or dependence. Length of stay depends on an individual's needs, but an average stay is 14 days.

### **Residential Treatment**

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

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

It is very common for young people to be disinterested or ambivalent about entering residential treatment. You can explain to them that the residential treatment programs are voluntary. They do not have to be enthusiastic about going to treatment to benefit from it, but their agreement is necessary. Based on the youth's treatment plan, the length of stay in residential treatment varies, but usually it is about 90 days.



## **TAKE ACTION**

**For more information on all these programs, please see Resources on page 26.**

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

## Additional Support for Adolescents in Recovery

### Recovery High School

The state sponsors Recovery High Schools in several communities. The schools are a place where teens can continue their education in a safe and supportive recovery community. To find out about Recovery High Schools call Youth Central Intake at 1-617-661-3991 (*see page 26*).

### Juvenile Drug Court

Juvenile Drug Courts are one way the courts are able to address substance use for youth involved in the juvenile court system. Drug courts are only offered in select cities throughout the state. Where available, these courts provide motivation for recovery and an alternative to incarceration.



## TAKE ACTION

For more information, contact the Administrative Office of the Juvenile Court at 1-617-788-6550, TTY: 1-617-788-6202.



## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

While it's true that some signs of use may catch our attention such as the smell of alcohol, empty 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 of cigarettes.”

— MARY\*, MOTHER OF A SON WHO WAS ADDICTED TO PRESCRIPTION DRUGS AND HEROIN

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#### **WARNING SIGNS OF TEEN SUBSTANCE USE:**

- ▶ Decline in school grades or attendance
  - ▶ Change in personality, such as moodiness or extreme irritability, withdrawing or being more secretive, or being unusually outgoing
  - ▶ Change in, or neglect, of appearance and hygiene
  - ▶ Change in sleeping patterns, such as not sleeping or long periods of sleep
  - ▶ Stealing money or possessions
  - ▶ Denial of use when confronted with evidence of use
  - ▶ Loss of interest in activities that were once enjoyed: sports, clubs, music, etc.
  - ▶ Change in friends, 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
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## Assessing for Learning Disabilities or Emotional Problems is Also Important

Substance abuse experts believe children with learning disabilities or emotional disorders should receive help with those conditions as well. Therefore, identifying and treating the emotional disorder and the substance use problem in an integrated way is vital for improving chances of recovery.

As you work with your outpatient provider, discuss your concerns about any underlying mental health issues your teen 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 teen's diagnosis, it's a good idea to get a second opinion.



## DID YOU KNOW?

**These conditions may be found in combination with substance use:**

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



## HELPING YOUR TEEN RECOGNIZE THE PROBLEM

There is no need for anyone to hit “rock bottom” before they receive help. The earlier your teen gets help, the better the chance of preventing addiction and getting back on track for a healthy future.

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

— DR. JOHN KNIGHT, DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR ADOLESCENT SUBSTANCE  
ABUSE RESEARCH, BOSTON CHILDREN’S HOSPITAL

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

It can be challenging to talk to your teen about substance use, so here are things other parents have found helpful to know. Your teen may deny problems, or even the fact that they are using. This is natural. Your teen, however, may also be feeling a loss of control or fear and feel a sense of relief that there is help available.

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 a united message. Throughout the course of your conversation, try to remain non-judgmental.

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## Some Parents Have Found These Dos and Don'ts Helpful...

- ⊘ Don't use loaded or critical language.
  - ⊘ Don't try to discuss substance use while your teen is high. Wait until a relatively calm moment for your discussion.
  - ⊘ Don't compare your teen to someone who has ruined his or her life by drinking.
  - ⊘ Don't compare your teen to his or her sibling, who might be successful and never use drugs.
  - ⊘ Never blame your teen for problems in the family.
  - ⊘ Don't interrupt your teen when he or she is genuinely trying to describe current pain, difficulties, or situations.
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## Do Try to...

- ✓ Tell your teen how much you love him/her. Say how worried you are about their recent moods and behavior. Explain how you would feel if anything ever happened to them.
- ✓ Empathize; listen when they describe 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 feel stressed about whether your friends 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 as non-judgmental and calm as possible.
- ✓ Remind your teen of their goals, such as being on a sports team or getting a part in a play, and that alcohol or drug use can get in the way.
- ✓ Guide your teen to their own understanding of the effects of the alcohol and/or other drug use. Explain that using alcohol or other drugs can have serious consequences in their lives. Youth who start using alcohol or drugs early are far more likely to have serious problems. Ask about the types of relationships they want to have with friends and family. Explain how getting help now will be helpful in creating a good life.
- ✓ Make it clear that you and the family will seek help from a treatment counselor.

## What If My Teen Still Refuses to Get Help?

Schedule an assessment with a counselor and plan to go with or without your teen. 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 counselor and if your teen is not there, they will not hear their side of the story. 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 of 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 alcohol or drugs, and rebuild trust."

- Inhalants or medications can be an issue. Keep them away from your teen. If these products must be used for a practical purpose, be there to supervise. For help with heroin or opioid painkiller issues, see Resources page for information about life-saving naloxone (Narcan), a medication that can reverse an overdose.



## TAKE ACTION

**Inhalant abuse is the intentional breathing in of gas and vapors with the goal of altering your mood. There are over 1,000 common 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).**



## HEAL YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY

### **Substance abuse affects the whole family.**

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

Congratulate yourself for the steps you have taken. Helping a teen through recovery is challenging, but you will be glad that you did it. Just as your teen in treatment needs your support, so do your other children.

## 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 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 teen to use substances. If you “enable” a teen you actually support or “feed” the patterns of substance abuse.

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### EXAMPLES OF ENABLING

- Putting up with verbally or physically abusive behavior
  - Making excuses or letting your teen get away with excuses that you know are false
  - Allowing your teen to constantly disregard rules you have set about curfews, or using a cell phone or car
  - Paying back another youth 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 other drugs with your teen or not taking their use seriously
-





## **TAKE ACTION**

To download or order free pamphlets and booklets on how to protect your other children from substance use, please visit [www.mass.gov/maclearinghouse](http://www.mass.gov/maclearinghouse) or call 1-800-952-6637 (TTY: Use MassRelay at 711 or 1-800-720-3480).



## Take Care of Yourself

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 with a trusted professional counselor, a member of the clergy, or a support group.
- Maintain your 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.

## Connect with Support Groups

As you go through the recovery process with your teen, you may feel a sense of isolation. The benefits of support can make a huge difference to your family. Other families who are struggling with similar issues are able to share their knowledge of effective ways to cope.

## Learn to Cope

Started by a mother of a child who was abusing drugs, Learn to Cope is a peer support group network for parents whose children are using drugs. Weekly meetings are held throughout the state. If parents are concerned about possible opioid overdose, they can obtain naloxone (Narcan) — a medication that can reverse an overdose — and receive training on how to use it at the meetings. Calling 911 is also essential. [www.learn2cope.org](http://www.learn2cope.org)

“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 they don’t know what they can do to help . . . That’s why we have our group.”

— S\*, MOTHER OF A RECOVERING YOUNG ADULT

## 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, alcohol- and drug-free life can make all the difference.

The call you make today is the first step toward creating a healthy future.

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“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\*, A RECOVERING ADDICT, 3 YEARS SOBER, 20 YEARS OLD

“I’m in recovery . . . 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\*, A RECOVERING ADDICT, 10 MONTHS SOBER, 21 YEARS OLD

## Resources and Phone Numbers for Substance Use Services

### 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:** Monday-Friday, 9am–5pm, except holidays

1-617-661-3991 or  
(Toll free) 1-866-705-2807  
TTY: 1-617-661-9051  
[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 for all ages. Staffed 7 days a week. Help is available in over 140 languages.

(Toll free) 1-800-327-5050  
TTY: Use MassRelay at 711  
or 1-800-720-3480  
[www.helpline-online.com](http://www.helpline-online.com)

### Naloxone (Narcan)

If opioids are an issue, talk to a physician or pharmacist about naloxone, a medication that can reverse an overdose. If an individual is unable to afford the naloxone kit or the co-pay, they can receive it from one of the DPH Overdose Education and Naloxone Distribution Pilot Sites; visit [www.mass.gov/opioids](http://www.mass.gov/opioids) and click on Intervention or Learn to Cope (See page 24).

### The Administrative Office of the Juvenile Court

To find out if there is Juvenile Court or Drug Court in your community, call 1-617-788-6550.

### Services for Substance Abuse and/or Mental Health in Emergencies:

“Emergency Services Programs” (ESP) are available to the uninsured, MassHealth subscribers, and many insured Massachusetts residents of all ages. This service can address issues that involve both substance abuse and mental health. It is available 24 hours a day/7 days a week/365 days a year.

(Toll free) 1-877-382-1609  
TTY: 1-800-249-9949  
[www.masspartnership.com/member/ESP.aspx](http://www.masspartnership.com/member/ESP.aspx)



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