

Tips for Parents: Addictions & Teens



Connection

The most important thing you can do: Stay warmly connected. A teen who feels close to their parents is significantly less likely to develop problematic substance use - and far more likely to come to you when something goes wrong. The relationship is the intervention.

Talk

Talk early, often & without lecturing. Start conversations before there's a problem. Ask what they think first. Curiosity keeps the door open; lectures close it. Critical thinking develops through collaborative problem solving.

Boundaries

Set clear limits - with warmth. Agree rules together where possible. Be specific, be consistent, and follow through. The most protective parents are warm and boundaried - not one or the other.

Understand

Know their world. Take interest in who their friends are, where they're going, and who they're with. This works best when it comes from trust, not surveillance - teens who feel trusted share more.

Example

Model behaviour you want to see. Your own drinking, screen use, and stress coping are your teen's most powerful lesson. Your kids are watching.



Know The Signs

Look for patterns, not single incidents - especially a change from your teen's normal. Key signs across all addictions: withdrawal from family and old friends, drop in school performance, increased secrecy and lying, strong mood changes when they can't access the substance or screen, and choosing it over things they used to love.

The Peer Brain - Why this matters

The teen brain is wired to care intensely about peer belonging. Research shows that simply being watched by peers nearly doubles risk-taking in teenagers - not because of pressure, but because of how the adolescent brain is built. This is normal and temporary - and it means the group your teen belongs to matters. Connect them to groups where belonging doesn't require substances: sport, arts, cultural groups, volunteering.

Harm reduction - Holding both

Abstinence from substances is the goal, especially while the brain is still developing. AND if something goes wrong, keep the door open. Make it clear to your teen they can always ask you for help no matter what - tell them "I will never make you sorry that you asked for my help" - if something goes wrong in the online or real world.

