

For the Parents of Kids with Substance Use Issues

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

It usually does not happen overnight; instead, it creeps in gradually. It eventually begins to dawn on you that your child's struggles might be linked to drug use. The idea that their child could be using drugs, let alone addicted to them, is too painful to contemplate. Many parents refuse to accept the possibility even when confronted with reports from friends, teachers, or neighbors. It often takes multiple reports from outsiders before parents are willing to consider that their child might have a problem with drugs.

Once parents recognize the issue, they face another significant challenge: deciding what to do about it. Some parents do nothing, hoping their child will "grow out of it." They may believe that they are the best source of help for their child, convinced that they can talk them out of it, love them through it, or punish them into submission. Others may try to remove their child from the environment, sending them to stay with relatives outside the community, hoping that a change of scenery will solve the problem. However, these approaches typically prove ineffective, delaying the child's access to the necessary help. After months or even years of attempting "home treatments," parents often become frustrated and angry, sometimes giving up on their child before they've had a chance for a real chance at recovery.

Disagreement between parents about handling the situation is typical and can lead to blame and conflict. Old relationship issues may resurface, causing further strain on the marriage. In some cases, these disagreements can irreparably damage the relationship and make it even harder for the child to recover. People with substance use disorder often exploit these divisions, playing one parent against the other to continue their destructive behaviors.

Parents also grapple with their own identity issues in dealing with their child's addiction. They may feel ashamed, worried about what others will think, or even fearful of being blamed by treatment staff if their child seeks professional help. All of these emotions add to the stress parents experience, leading to physical and emotional symptoms and strained relationships with other family members. Many find themselves withdrawing socially, feeling isolated from emotional support.

However, parents don't have to face these challenges alone. Help is available not only for the child with a drug problem but also for the parents and other family members. Seeking support for themselves can be a crucial step toward their child's recovery. Professional substance abuse services and programs like Al-Anon, a 12-step program for family members, are widely available in most communities. See the [Links](#) page for information on how to contact Al-Anon.

The toll of worry on parents is immense. They live in constant fear of their child overdosing, committing suicide, becoming a victim of homicide, or ending up in jail. Years of sleepless nights, waiting for the dreaded phone call, take their toll physically and emotionally. But there is hope. By reaching out for support and understanding, parents can find the strength

Dealing with a loved one's substance use problems is very stressful, and many people neglect their own self-care instead of taking better care of themselves. The Worry Workbook is a concise and practical guide to understanding and managing worry, providing valuable tools and exercises to help you gain clarity and peace of mind. You can cultivate self-awareness and resilience in uncertainty by learning effective problem-solving strategies. Beyond addressing cognitive and emotional components of stress, "The Worry Workbook" encourages you to examine lifestyle factors like nutrition, exercise, and sleep and their profound impact on overall well-being so that you can take tangible steps toward stepping up your self-care amid stressful life circumstances. Though this workbook is not specific to living with addiction in your family, it can empower empower your self-care activities for your own well-being.

to navigate their child's addiction and support their journey to recovery.

Note: This article has been revised and edited from its original version, which was previously published IN 2012 on this page. The content has been updated for contemporary language, clarity and accuracy.

\$4.95

