

Signs and Symptoms of Substance Abuse

A substance use disorder (SUD) is a disease that affects a person's brain and behavior and leads to an inability to control the use of a legal or illegal drug or medication. A SUD can occur simultaneously in individuals with mental health disorders, usually to cope with overwhelming symptoms. The combination of these two disorders has its own term: dual diagnosis, or co-occurring disorders. According to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 9.2 million U.S. adults experienced both a mental health and a substance use disorder in 2018.

Signs and symptoms of a SUD

The following questions may help determine if an individual has a SUD. The more “yes” answers, the more likely the individual's drinking or drug use is a problem.

- Have you ever felt you should cut down on your drinking or drug use?
- Have you tried to cut back, but couldn't?
- Do you ever lie about how much or how often you drink or use drugs?
- Are you going through prescription medication at a faster-than-prescribed rate?
- Have your friends or family members expressed concern about your alcohol or drug use?
- Do you ever feel bad, guilty, or ashamed about your drinking or drug use?
- On more than one occasion, have you done or said something while drunk or high that you later regretted?
- Have you ever blacked out from drinking or drug use?
- Has your alcohol or drug use caused problems in your relationships?
- Has your alcohol or drug use gotten you into trouble at work or with the law?

How you can help...without losing you

Because resistance to treatment is common and the road to recovery can be long, the best way to help someone is to accept what you can and cannot do. You cannot force someone to remain sober, nor can you make someone take their medication or keep appointments. What you *can* do is make positive choices for yourself, encourage your loved one to get help, and offer your support while making sure you don't lose yourself in the process.

Seek support. Coping with a loved one's mental health and substance use disorders can be painful and isolating, so make sure you're getting the emotional support you need to cope. Talk to someone you trust about what you're going through or join a support group.

Set boundaries. Be realistic about the amount of care you're able to provide without feeling overwhelmed and resentful. Set limits on disruptive behaviors and stick to them. Letting the co-occurring disorders take over your life isn't healthy for you or your loved one.

Educate yourself. Learn all you can about your loved one's disorders. The more you understand what your loved one is going through, the better able you'll be to support recovery.

Be patient. Recovery is an ongoing process and relapse is common. Ongoing support for both you and your loved one is crucial, but you can get through this difficult time together and regain control of your lives.