

Does Your Mom or Dad Have a Substance Use Disorder?

If your parent is drinking too much or using drugs in a way that changes how they act, think, or feel, you might be wondering if they have a problem. It can be confusing and scary to see someone you love struggle with substance use, especially if you feel like you have to keep it a secret.

Signs That Your Parent Might Have a Substance Use Disorder (SUD)

A parent with a substance use disorder (SUD) may:

- Drink or use other substances in secret or hide bottles and pills.
- Seem different—moody, angry, sad, or distant.
- Forget things they promised to do or have trouble keeping a job.
- Sleep a lot or not at all, sometimes seeming “out of it.”
- Get sick often or act in ways that don’t make sense.
- Drive unsafely or put themselves and others in dangerous situations.
- Not take the best care of you or your needs each day

If this sounds familiar, you’re not alone. Millions of kids and teens in this country have parents with substance use disorders.

What It Feels Like for You

Living with a parent who has a substance use disorder can be tough. You might feel:

- **Embarrassed** – Worried about what others will think if they find out.
- **Angry** – Frustrated that your parent isn’t acting like they should.
- **Guilty** – Thinking you might have done something to cause their behavior (you didn’t!).
- **Lonely** – Like no one else understands what you’re going through.

These feelings are normal, but they can be heavy to carry alone.

You Didn't Cause It, and You Can't Fix It

Dr. Claudia Black, an expert on families affected by the disease of addiction, describes the three unspoken rules in families where SUD is present:

1. **Don't talk** – Families might pretend the problem doesn't exist.
2. **Don't feel** – You might be told to ignore your emotions.
3. **Don't trust** – It can be hard to believe that things will get better.

But these rules can be broken. Healing is possible for you, even if your parents aren't ready for treatment yet.

How to Take Care of Yourself

You can't control your parent's substance misuse, but you can take steps to protect your own well-being:

- **Talk to someone you trust** A teacher, counselor, coach, or friend's parent can help.
- **Find a support group** Alateen and other groups offer safe places to share.
- **Take care of your body** Try to eat healthy foods when you can, move your body, and aim for 9–10 hours of sleep each night.
- **Know the Seven Cs** These reminders can help:

I didn't Cause it.

I can't Cure it.

I can't Control it.

But I can take Care of myself

By Communicating my feelings,

Making healthy Choices,

And Celebrating myself.

You are not alone, and you deserve support.