

## If Your Child is Using: How to Step In and Help

Intervention is not always a formal process involving drug counselors and group confrontation. Substance abuse treatment can actually start right at the kitchen table with a conversation. Here are 10 steps you can take right now if your child is using drugs:

1. Discuss — and agree to — a plan of action for your child's substance abuse treatment with your spouse or his other parent or guardian.
2. Pick a time to talk to your child when he or she is not high or drunk, or extremely upset or angry.
3. Make it clear that you love your child, and that by bringing up substance abuse treatment you are showing your concern for his safety and well-being.
4. Point out to your child that, as parents, it is your job to make sure he or she reaches adulthood as safely as possible.
5. Spell out the warning signs of alcohol and drug use that you've observed in your child's behavior. Use the screener results to explain that the problem warrants serious attention and family support, as well as professional help, because without substance abuse treatment it can get out of control and can even be fatal. You may want to detail the negative effects of the person's substance use on you and your family but it's important to remain neutral and non-judgmental in tone. To sum up the warning signs at this step, you should state that the pursuit of substance use despite adverse effects on yourself or others is actually the definition of "drug addiction." Don't press the child to agree on this assessment of the problem.
6. Actively listen to anything and everything your child has to say in response. The listening step is crucial, to establish empathy and to convey that you really see and hear your child. If he or she brings up related problems, they should be listened to with a promise of being addressed separately. Reiterate that what you are addressing at the moment is substance abuse, which is serious and can be at the core of other problems.
7. Then, to empower your child and get him to think about his substance use in a new way, ask him questions about what he wants out of his life and how things are going with school, his friends, his parents, siblings, job, activities, etc.
8. Prompt your child to consider the link between substance use and where her life is not matching up to her dreams and wishes.
9. Ask the child -- in light of what he or she is concluding in this conversation about the substance abuse effect on his or her life -- to reassess the problem. Set a goal for getting well. Together, plan out some concrete steps to find information about addiction, recovery and resources, and identify any necessary professional substance abuse treatment.
10. Understand that the conversation you just had is actually a successful "intervention," a first concrete step toward interrupting the progression of the problem and getting well. It is a good idea to reiterate again your love and caring concern for your child. Acknowledge yourselves, knowing that you need and deserve strong encouragement and support, and have the power to solve this problem together.