

How to Support Teens Impacted by a Loved One's Substance Use Disorder

1. LISTEN

Impacted teens often feel like their emotions are a burden or fear getting in trouble for speaking up.

- Offer time and a safe, confidential space to share.
- Remind them their feelings matter and are not too much.
- Use nonjudgmental language — e.g.: say “a person struggling” instead of “addict”.

2. EDUCATE

Teens are smart and may sense a lot, but they may not fully understand substance use disorder or how recovery works.

- Let them know they are not alone — many families go through this.
- Reassure them it is not their fault and they cannot fix it.
- Share that this is a disease, not a moral failure.
- Normalize talking about feelings with safe people.
- Remind them recovery is possible and help is real.
- Teach what healthy boundaries look like.
- Validate that it is okay to love someone and still be angry.
- Inspire them to choose their own future — their story can be different.

3. SUPPORT

Teens need more than awareness — they need tools to stay safe and emotionally grounded.

- Help them name and express feelings without shame.
- Work with them to identify safe people and places.
- Encourage activities that bring joy and self-care, even in hard times.
- Empower teens to focus on what they can control and let go of the rest.
- Keep hope alive — remind them that healing and stability are possible.



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