

# Dual Diagnosis: Adolescents with Co-occurring Brain Disorders & Substance Abuse Disorders



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Having two disorders (a mental illness and a substance use disorder) is called dual diagnosis. Dual diagnosis is very common.

## ***What causes these disorders?***

Different kinds of mental illnesses are caused by different things. Sometimes a teenager feels bad and uses drugs or alcohol to try and feel better. This can lead to addiction or dependency on that substance. Sometimes, a teenager starts experimenting with drugs or alcohol and this causes brain changes to develop into a mental illness. Often, we are not sure which one came first.

## ***Why is it so hard to get help for dual diagnosis?***

There are many programs to help with substance use. There are also many programs to help with mental illnesses. There are not a lot of programs that treat both at the same time. People with dual diagnosis need to treat mental illness and substance use together.

## ***What does not help people with dual diagnosis?***

- Saying things like “Just say no”.
- Shaming or trying to “scare them straight”
- Treatment programs that are just for substance use.
- Treatment programs that are just for mental illnesses.

## ***What is a better approach? What does help people with dual diagnosis?***

- Therapy
- Medication
- Programs that treat mental illnesses and substance use disorders at the same time
- Support groups

## ***If your teen has dual diagnosis***

- Encourage them to go to support groups
- Do not nag, preach or lecture
- Set rules and follow through
- Help them join after school activities, part time jobs or volunteering opportunities
- Do not expect them to get better right away
- Give love, support and understanding
- Get support for yourself; go to support groups, talk with friends, or take time for yourself
- Remember that recovery is possible

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