Using drugs is called a substance use disorder. Teens that use drugs or alcohol often have a mental illness like depression or anxiety. 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 to feel better. This can lead to an addiction or dependence on that substance. Sometimes, a teenager starts experimenting with drugs or alcohol and this causes brain changes that develop into a mental illness. Often, we aren’t 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 to treat substance use and mental illness at the same time. People with dual diagnosis need to treat mental illness and substance use together.

**What doesn’t help people with dual diagnosis?**

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

**What does help people with dual diagnosis?**

- Therapy
- Medication
- Programs that treat mental illnesses and substance use disorders together
- Support groups

**If your teen has dual diagnosis:**

- Encourage your child to go to support groups
- Don’t nag, preach, or lecture
- Don’t say, “if you loved me, you would stop doing drugs.” It is like saying “If you loved me, you would not have diabetes.”
- Set rules and follow through. They still need boundaries and consequences for their behavior.
- Help your teen join after-school activities. Working part-time or volunteering can also help your teen
- Don’t expect your child to get better right away
- Give love, support, and understanding
- Get support for yourself: go to a formal support group, talk to a friend, or take time for yourself.
- Remember that recovery is possible

See more: https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Related-Conditions/Dual-Diagnosis
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