

What's the *Big Deal* ABOUT ADDICTIONS?

ANSWERS
and HELP
for TEENS

free spirit
PUBLISHING®

JAMES J. CRIST, PH.D., C.S.A.C.

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Note to readers: This book contains information and advice about addictions. The concepts, ideas, and suggestions contained here should not replace professional medical and psychiatric treatment.

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Introduction



Anthony looks forward to hanging out with his lacrosse team buddies after games. Sometimes his teammates bring a six-pack of beer or some Jack Daniels to celebrate their wins. While laughing and joking with his friends seems harmless, Anthony can't help but think about what their coach told the team at the beginning of the season: they can get kicked off the team permanently if they drink or use drugs.

Adrian spends a lot of time gaming. Most of their weekends are spent in front of a screen. Adrian's parents complain about how much time Adrian spends online, but Adrian says it's okay because that's where their friends are.

Julian enjoys smoking weed with his friends. He does it mostly on the weekends, and since he doesn't do it every weekend, he figures he doesn't have a problem. Lately, though, he has started using more during the week because it helps him relax and get to sleep.

Keiko started using by experimenting with prescription drugs she found in her parents' medicine cabinet. Vicodin seemed interesting, and she tried it with her friends. They found that they liked the high they got from it, especially when they took more pills than recommended on the bottle. Keiko and her friends liked the feeling so much that they started raiding the medicine cabinets of their other friends and family members.

You may know teens like Anthony, Adrian, Julian, and Keiko. Maybe you can relate to their stories. Seems like their behavior is pretty harmless, right? What's so bad about having alcohol at a party, staying up late gaming, smoking a joint with friends, or sneaking a few prescription pills from your parents' medicine cabinet? While some teens might never get caught and it seems like they're not having problems as a result, many find their lives turned upside down by activities like these. Fighting with parents or friends, missing class because you're too tired to get up, losing privileges, earning lower grades, and even being expelled from school or getting arrested are just a few of the problems that can happen when alcohol, drugs, or other activities become addictive.

Why I Wrote This Book

I thought about writing this book for a long time before I actually sat down to write it. I started out as a substance abuse counselor for a city agency, where I worked with adults addicted to heroin, alcohol, cocaine, and PCP. Throughout my career, I've continued to work with people who have addictions, and many of my current clients are teens. What I've found is that while some teens are able to use drugs or alcohol on occasion, others can't control their use, even after their parents find out, they get kicked out of school, or they end up on probation or in juvenile detention. I've also learned that just telling people to stop, or yelling at them

about consequences (which is what many adults do), doesn't really help. Listening respectfully, appreciating the reasons why people use drugs and alcohol, and having a conversation about the pros and cons is much more helpful.

Since finding out about the many similarities between substance addictions (drugs and alcohol) and other addictions (such as tech, gaming, social media, self-injury, gambling, and so on), I have been able to use the same strategies that help people addicted to drugs and alcohol to help people who have problems with a variety of activities. And now I'm sharing this knowledge with you.

How This Book Can Help

This book will give you reliable and factual information about alcohol, drugs, and other addictions, without the lecturing you might hear elsewhere. You'll also learn how many teens actually use drugs and alcohol. There's a lot of misinformation out there, and you need to know about the risks involved so you can make informed decisions about activities that affect your relationships, health, and wellness.

You'll learn the difference between casual use and addictive use and how to figure out if you (or a family member or a friend) really have a problem. You'll find out about the possible consequences of risky behavior, ways to help yourself feel good without drugs and alcohol, and things you can do to overcome your addictions. Straightforward information about the various treatment options is provided, as well as proven tips to keep you from slipping back into old habits and help you avoid relapse.

Maybe you've never had a problem with addictive substances or behaviors. This book can help you too. In it you'll find answers to your questions about alcohol, drugs, and other activities as well as tips to help you avoid developing an addiction in the future.

Of course, reading this book doesn't replace getting professional help if you have a chemical or behavioral addiction. Talk to your parents or guardians, or another trusted adult such as a doctor, school counselor, teacher, or coach, if you think you need help. If you are already getting help for an addiction, talking with your doctor or therapist about the information you learn in this book might help you get better faster.

How to Use This Book

You can read this book cover-to-cover or skip around to find the parts most relevant to you.

Chapter 1 gives you an overview of drug and alcohol addictions in teens, including how common they are and how to tell the difference between casual use and addictive use. You'll learn what a substance use disorder is and how to tell if you have it. Examples of benefits of using drugs and alcohol, as well as negative consequences of using them, are provided.

Chapter 2 explains more about alcohol use. You'll learn what a blood alcohol concentration is and how the amount you drink affects your behavior and your health. Information on drinking alcohol responsibly, should you choose to drink, is provided.

Chapter 3 reviews similar information regarding drug use. Various drugs people abuse are reviewed, as well as some of the risks involved with each. Information about how drug use can lead to legal consequences is included.

Chapter 4 covers addiction to tech (electronics), such as gaming, phone use, and social media, and how to tell if you might have a problem. Suggestions on how to monitor your use and avoid a tech addiction are provided, along with a brief overview of cyberbullying and how to handle it.

Chapter 5 focuses on activity addictions, such as addiction to food, sex, self-injury, shopping, and gambling. You'll learn how to tell if these are just bad habits or if they're addictions that cause problems for you.

Chapter 6 shares ways to get help with addictive behaviors, including figuring out if you are ready to quit. You'll learn about the stages of recovery, symptoms of withdrawal, the different types of treatment for addictions, how support groups can help, and how the presence of other disorders (such as ADHD or depression) can make treatment more challenging.

Chapter 7 gives you strategies that can help you keep from slipping back into addictions and shares ways to help you feel good without using drugs, alcohol, or other addictive activities. These include learning to identify your triggers and warning signs for relapse, learning to manage your emotions, and finding healthier substitutes for addictive behaviors. Information regarding drug testing and how to cope if you do relapse is provided.

Finally, the **glossary** includes a variety of terms used in this book, and the **resources** point you toward places you can go for help and more information.

As you read, try to keep an open mind. You're probably used to adults telling you that should never use alcohol or drugs, that you have a problem, or that you should give up your gaming or social media habit completely. No one likes being nagged about their behavior and it would be easy to just tune these people out and assume that they're overreacting. But what if they're not? Wouldn't it be a good idea to find out for yourself? Even if you're not sure about yourself, you may recognize some of your family members or friends in this book. By sharing what you learn with them, you might be able to help them too. Either way, you'll have more information that you can use to make important decisions about yourself and your life.



CHAPTER 1

What's the Big Deal About Addictions?

Bethany likes using marijuana. It helps her relax and makes many of her activities more fun, even just watching TV or playing video games. At first, she made money for weed by selling it to kids at school. But after getting caught and being suspended, she figured it was time to stop. After a few weeks, though, she started craving it and thought it wouldn't hurt to use every once in a while. She thought she could limit her use, but now she has started smoking more often, even though she knows her grandparents are drug testing her.

Nico likes using his e-cigarette in the school bathroom with his friends. It's fun trying to sneak around school officials, and it gives him a boost for the day. Besides, he's been able to meet a whole new group of friends just by vaping. Nico also has a part-time job, so he uses some of that money to buy the pods from an older coworker and sell them to his friends.

Are these teens just having fun? Are their behaviors harmless, or are they starting to cause trouble? How much is too much? Where do you draw the line?

You've probably heard people tell you that *any* drug or alcohol use as a teenager is bad, that it can cause lifelong problems. But is this true? In this chapter, you'll learn how to tell the difference between casual use and addictive use of substances, how many teens actually use drugs and alcohol, and some of the effects drug and alcohol use can have, both negative and positive. You'll learn more about other addictions, such as gaming, porn, and social media, and how to spot problems with them in chapters 4 and 5.

A NOTE ON TERMS

Abuse and addiction are similar terms. Both cause problems in your life. But generally, abuse is less severe and may only cause temporary consequences physically, socially, and psychologically. Addiction is more serious. People with an addiction use more often, in greater amounts, and have lasting physical consequences, including changes to their brains. Most people with addiction experience withdrawal symptoms, such as irritability, sleep disturbance, or even physical pain.

Casual Use or Addictive Use?

"I don't do it all the time, so I can't be addicted."

• • • •

"Smoking weed is the only way I can fall asleep. I can still get up in the morning."

For many teens, occasional use of a substance may never cause a problem. They don't lose sleep, get in trouble, get lower grades, or feel worse after using. It may not be a wise choice to use, since using is illegal for teens, but they know when to stop. You must be 21 to purchase cigarettes, e-cigarettes, and alcohol in the United States. In states where marijuana is legal, you also have to be at least 21 to purchase it for recreational use and 18 for medical

use.* However, this doesn't stop some teens from using. Here's an example:

Maria drinks alcohol with her friends on the weekends. Not every weekend, just when she hangs out with friends. Her parents don't know about her use, and she only has a couple beers or malt beverages at a time, just enough to catch a buzz. She doesn't get drunk and she has never done anything dangerous while drinking, such as driving, and hasn't done anything she later regretted.

Maria's use doesn't seem to be causing problems, at least not yet. She doesn't think her use is a big deal. But for other people, once they start using, they want to do it more and more often, and in greater and greater amounts. These are the people who are most likely to get addicted. Once this happens, continuing to use drugs or alcohol can cause serious problems. It can affect your physical health, your mental health, your grades, your relationships, and your work. It can also get you in trouble with the law.

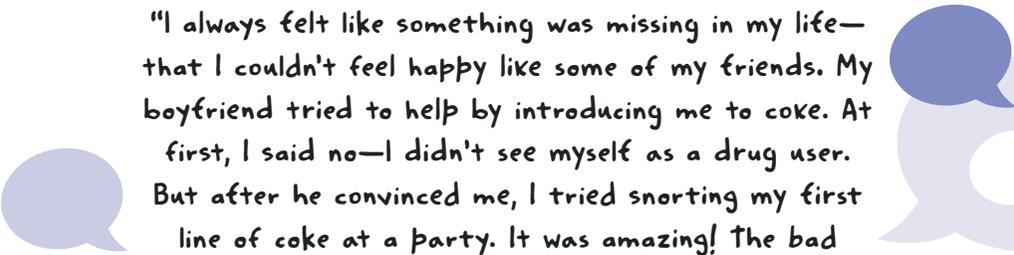
Even Occasional Use Can Lead to Addiction



"I was always really anxious as a kid. I'd worry about everything. Once I started drinking, it seemed like my fears disappeared and I could talk to people at a party or even go up to a girl I liked. But while my friends were able to stop after a while, I always wanted more. Two beers turned into 10 beers. It wasn't until I started driving home drunk after parties that I realized I had a problem."



* If you don't live in the United States, you'll need to see what age restrictions are in your area.



"I always felt like something was missing in my life—that I couldn't feel happy like some of my friends. My boyfriend tried to help by introducing me to coke. At first, I said no—I didn't see myself as a drug user. But after he convinced me, I tried snorting my first line of coke at a party. It was amazing! The bad feelings disappeared, and I felt on top of the world! At first, I only did it once in a while, but after a few months, I found myself using daily. I couldn't handle the comedown when it wore off. I spent most of my summer earnings on drugs and had nothing to show for it."

Addiction is a compulsive need for a habit-forming substance or activity. This need can be physical, psychological, or both. Not everyone who uses alcohol or drugs goes on to become addicted. Most adults, for example, can have a few drinks and know when to stop, and their use doesn't cause problems for them in their lives. However, most people who smoke cigarettes do get addicted. It is one of the hardest habits to break.

The first few times someone uses alcohol or drugs, it's generally a choice. Maybe someone at a party offered you a cigarette, a blunt, a pill, or a beer and you decided to give it a try. No one is forcing you to do it, and you can decide to stop whenever you want. But when you use a substance repeatedly, your brain changes and you may want to use more often and in greater amounts.

Brain chemistry plays a large part in addictions. Most people seek out addictive activities for three basic reasons: wanting to relax or reduce anxiety, looking for excitement and stimulation, and wanting to alter their perceptions to have an interesting experience. (For ways to feel good without resorting to drugs and alcohol, see the sidebar on page 17. Chapter 7 also shares ideas to help you stay away from drugs, alcohol, and other addictive activities.) People can also be motivated by more than



How to Interpret Percentages

If a statistic says that 20 percent of teens use alcohol, this means that out of every 100 teens, 20 of them use alcohol and 80 do not. A statistic of 50 percent means half of all teens use alcohol.

one reason at a time. Most addictions (including activity addictions) increase the production of the brain chemical dopamine. Increasing dopamine makes activities more enjoyable and can make people want to do more of the ones they like, even to excess. However, the human body eventually gets used to whatever new stimulation it's provided, making the activity less rewarding. As a result, a

person needs to have more and more of the substance (or to spend more and more time on the activity) to feel good. This is called increasing tolerance, which is a warning sign of addiction.

Since addiction often runs in families, some of a person's potential for addiction is genetic, meaning that if you have family members with addiction problems, the chances are greater that you'll have problems too.

Substance Use Disorder

Mental health counselors call addiction to substances, including alcohol and drugs, substance use disorders. Essentially, substance use becomes a disorder when a person keeps using drugs or alcohol even after it starts to cause them problems. Symptoms fall into one of four categories:

1. Loss of control over your use
2. Problems getting along with others as a result of your use
3. Using when it is risky or dangerous to do so (for example, driving a car or bike or performing other activities, such as skateboarding, after using alcohol or drugs)
4. Physical changes in your body (needing more to get the same effect—called tolerance) or symptoms of withdrawal (such as being grouchy, having trouble sleeping, or being more anxious) when you stop using the substance