



Huron County Board of Mental Health and Addiction Services

2 Oak Street • Norwalk, Ohio 44857 • 419-681-6268

National Drug and Alcohol Facts Week

March 22-28, 2021 is National Drug and Alcohol Facts Week, an opportunity to share facts about drugs, alcohol, and addiction with our community. The goal of providing this information is to educate the community, help prevent substance use and addiction, and provide resources for treatment and support services.

Use and misuse of alcohol, nicotine, and illicit drugs, and misuse of prescription drugs cost Americans more than \$700 billion a year in increased health care costs, crime, and lost productivity. Every year, illicit and prescription drug overdoses cause tens of thousands of deaths (nearly 70,000 in 2018), alcohol contributes to the death of more than 90,000 Americans, while tobacco is linked to an estimated 480,000 deaths per year.

People of all ages can suffer from the harmful consequences of the use and abuse of nicotine, drugs, and alcohol: *(Note: hereafter, the term “drugs” will refer to nicotine, illicit or prescription drug abuse, and alcohol use because all listed substances are considered addictive substances/drugs).*

- Youth who use drugs may act out and may do poorly in school or drop out. Using addictive substances when the brain is still developing may cause lasting brain changes and put the user at increased risk of dependence.
- Adults who abuse addictive substances can have problems thinking clearly, remembering, and paying attention. They may develop poor social behaviors as a result of their use, and their work performance and personal relationships suffer.
- Parents' abuse of addictive substances can mean chaotic, stress-filled homes, as well as child abuse and neglect. Such conditions harm the well-being and development of children in the home and may set the stage for drug use in the next generation.
- Babies exposed to nicotine, drugs, or alcohol in the womb may be born premature and underweight. This exposure can slow the child's ability to learn and affect behavior later in life. They may also become dependent on the substances used by the mother during pregnancy, a condition called neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS).

What is ADDICTION?

Many people consider addiction to be a problem of personal weakness, initiated for self-gratification and continued use because of an unwillingness or lack of sufficient willpower to stop. However, within the medical and scientific communities, clinicians and scientists alike now think that many people engage in potentially addictive activities to escape pain, both physical and emotional. People typically engage in mind-altering experiences to feel good or to feel better. The roots of addiction reside in activities associated with sensation seeking and self-medication.

Addiction is a treatable, chronic medical disease involving complex interactions among brain circuits, genetics, the environment, and an individual's life experiences. Individuals struggling with addiction use substances or engage in behaviors that become compulsive and often continue with such behaviors despite harmful consequences.

Why do PEOPLE TAKE DRUGS?

- *To feel good.* Drugs can produce intense feelings of pleasure. This initial euphoria is followed by other effects, which differ with the type of drug used.
- *To feel better.* Some people who suffer from social anxiety, stress, and depression start using substances to try to feel less anxious. Stress can also play a major role in starting and continuing use of an addictive substance.
- *To do better.* Some people feel pressure to improve their focus in school or at work or their abilities in sports. This can play a role in trying or continuing to use drugs.



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•*Curiosity and social pressure.* In this respect, teens are particularly at risk because peer pressure can be very strong. Adolescence is a developmental period during which the presence of risk factors, such as peers who use drugs, may lead to substance use.

If taking drugs makes people feel good or better, WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

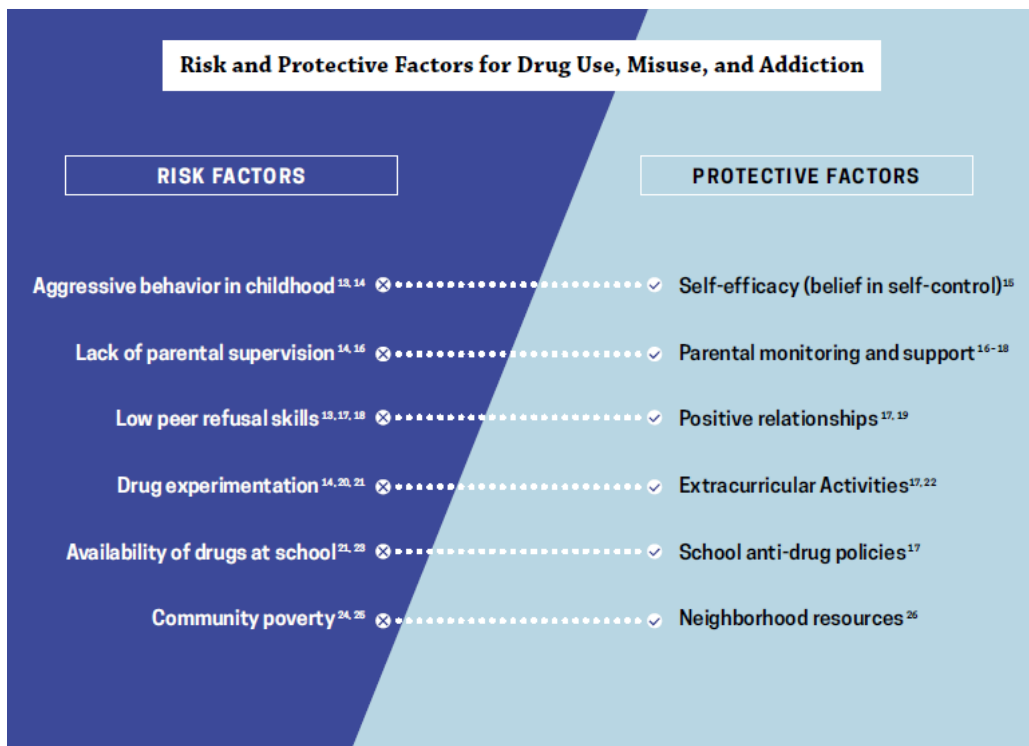
When they first use a drug, people may perceive what seem to be positive effects. They also may believe they can control their use. But drugs can quickly take over a person's life. Over time, if drug use continues, other pleasurable activities become less pleasurable, and the person has to take the drug just to feel "normal." They have a hard time controlling their need to take drugs even though it causes many problems for themselves and their loved ones. Some people may start to feel the need to take more of a drug or take it more often, even in the early stages of their drug use. These are the signs of an addiction. Even relatively moderate drug use poses dangers. Consider how a social drinker can become intoxicated, get behind the wheel of a car, and quickly turn a seemingly pleasurable activity into a tragedy that affects other's lives. Occasional drug use, such as misusing an opioid to get high, can have similarly disastrous effects, including impaired driving and overdose.

Do people choose to KEEP USING DRUGS?

The initial decision to use addictive substances is typically voluntary. But with continued use, a person's ability to exert self-control can become seriously impaired. This impairment in self-control is the hallmark of addiction. Brain imaging studies of people with addiction show physical changes in areas of the brain that are critical to judgment, decision-making, learning and memory, and behavior control. These changes help explain the compulsive nature of addiction.

Why do some people become addicted to drugs, WHILE OTHERS DO NOT?

As with other diseases and disorders, the likelihood of developing an addiction differs from person to person, and no single factor determines whether a person will become addicted to substances. In general, the more risk factors a person has, the greater the chance that ingesting addictive substances will lead to addiction. Protective factors, on the other hand, reduce a person's risk. Risk and protective factors may be either environmental or biological. No single factor determines whether a person will become addicted to drugs.





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WHAT BIOLOGICAL FACTORS increase the risk of addiction?

Biological factors that can affect a person's risk of addiction include their genes, stage of development, and even gender or ethnicity.

WHAT ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS increase the risk of addiction?

Environmental factors are those related to the family, school, and neighborhood. Factors that can increase a person's risk include the following:

- Home and family. The home environment, especially during childhood, is a very important factor. Parents or older family members who use drugs or misuse alcohol, or who break the law, can increase children's risk of future drug problems.
- Peers and school. Friends and other peers can have an increasingly strong influence during the teen years. Youth who use drugs can sway even those without risk factors to try drugs for the first time. Struggling in school or having poor social skills can put a child at further risk for using or becoming addicted to drugs.

What other factors increase the RISK OF ADDICTION?

- Early use. Although using addictive substances at any age can lead to addiction, research shows that the earlier people begin to use drugs, the more likely they are to develop serious problems. This may be due to the harmful effect that drugs can have on the developing brain.

Why is adolescence a critical time for PREVENTING DRUG ADDICTION?

As noted previously, early use of drugs increases a person's chances of becoming addicted because drugs change the function of the brain and can lead to addiction and other serious problems. So, preventing early use of drugs or alcohol may go a long way in reducing these risks.

Risk of drug use increases greatly during times of transition. For an adult, a divorce or loss of a job may increase the risk of drug use. For a teenager, risky times include moving, family divorce, or changing schools. When children advance from elementary through middle school, they face new and challenging social, family, and academic situations. Often during this period, children are exposed to substances such as cigarettes and alcohol for the first time. When they enter high school, teens may encounter greater availability of drugs, drug use by older teens, and social activities where drugs and alcohol are used. When individuals leave high school and live more independently, either in college or as an employed adult, they may find themselves exposed to increased alcohol and drug use while separated from the protective structure provided by family and school. A certain amount of risk-taking is a normal part of adolescent development and the desire to try new things and become more independent is healthy, but it may also increase youth's tendencies to experiment with drugs. The parts of the brain that control judgment and decision-making do not fully develop until individuals are in their early to mid-20s. This limits a youth's ability to accurately assess the risks of alcohol use or drug experimentation and makes young people more vulnerable to peer pressure. Because the brain is still developing, using alcohol or drugs at this age has more potential to disrupt brain function in areas that are critical to motivation, memory, learning, judgment, and behavior control.

It is important to note that prevention programs have proven to be effective, but families and influential adults continue to play the most important role in determining how youth handle the lure of alcohol, cigarettes, misuse of prescription drugs, and illegal drugs. More recent studies have shown that parents and guardians (and adults influential in a youth's life) who speak to their children about the issues and have dinner with them on a regular basis, have children with a lower rate of use and abuse.

To learn more about youth prevention efforts in Huron County, contact Niki Cross, Director of the Huron County Family and Children First Council and Huron County Prevention Coalition at Nicole.Cross@jfs.ohio.gov.



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Can addiction be TREATED SUCCESSFULLY?

Addiction is a treatable disorder and prevention efforts and treatment approaches for addiction can be successful. Research on the science of addiction and the treatment of substance use disorders has led to the development of research-based methods that help people to stop using drugs and resume productive lives, also known as being in recovery. It important to understand that treatment for addiction usually isn't a cure. But addiction can be managed successfully. Treatment enables people to counteract addiction's disruptive effects on their brain and behavior and regain control of their lives.

If you or someone you know is struggling with addiction and is in need of treatment, below is a list of local treatment providers and support services:

Firelands Counseling and Recovery Services (mental health and addiction counseling): 419-663-3737

Family Life Counseling & Psychiatric Services (mental health and addiction counseling): 567-560-3584

Oriana House LLC (addiction counseling): 567-280-4023

Let's Get Real, Inc (peer support, access to inpatient treatment and detox): 567-743-7130

Sources: <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/what-is-addiction-2017061911870>

<https://www.asam.org/Quality-Science/definition-of-addiction>

<https://teens.drugabuse.gov/national-drug-alcohol-facts-week>

<https://youth.gov/youth-topics/substance-abuse/evidence-based-programs-youth-substance-abuse-prevention-and-treatment>