

Understanding Addiction

Substance use disorders impact many Head Start children, families, and staff. The Understanding Addiction tip sheet gives current information about addiction, overdose, treatment, and recovery. It also shares how Head Start programs can support those impacted by substance use.



- **More than 20 million Americans have a substance use disorder (also called an addiction).** Addiction is a treatable medical disease that can last for a long time. Having an addiction doesn't mean someone is weak or a bad person.
- **Overdoses are the No.1 cause of accidental death in the United States.** From December 2019 to December 2020, over 93,000 people died from overdoses in the United States — the highest number ever recorded.
- **Anyone can become addicted to alcohol or drugs.** There are several reasons for this, including their genes, how drugs interact with their brain, their environment, their experiences, and mental health issues. However, not everyone who tries drugs becomes addicted.
- **Overdoses are preventable.** Naloxone, a medication that temporarily stops an opioid overdose, is available in your community.
- **Treatment works, and recovery is possible.** People in recovery can lead healthy, normal lives. There is no single way to recover. Recovery can take time — be patient, even when it is hard!
- **People are more likely to get treatment and recover when their families, friends, providers, and communities support them without judging them.** Learn about resources in your community.

“For me, recovery is very important. I want something more out of my life, and I’m excited to go get it.”
-Bryant, Shatterproof ambassador



“It’s not an ‘other’ kind of situation. It’s an ‘all of us’ situation.”
-Toscha, Early Head Start director

“It was all from the heart, like I felt it. I came home from jail, and I went straight to the day care to thank all those staff members. Those women believed in me and saw more in me each day.”
-Gina, Head Start parent



How can you help?

Support families: Discuss drug or alcohol use, consider using a screening tool to check for drug or alcohol use problems, and refer families to resources for support or treatment, if needed.

Encourage family members to communicate with their health care providers if they have any questions or concerns about medications they are taking.

Share resources with families about how to get rid of unused medications safely.

[The Journey to Recovery: Head Start Takes Action on Substance Use Disorders](#)

[Talking with Families About Substance Use Disorders: Screening and Consultation](#)

[Head Start Programs Support Families in Recovery](#)
[Ending the Stigma of Addiction](#)



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