

Parent Tip Sheet

Supporting Teens in Recovery

AADAC Youth Services

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AADAC Adult

Counselling &
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Parental support is very important to teens in recovery because young people look to their relationship with their parents as a base for building a new, "non-using" life.

For many young people, recovery means developing a new lifestyle: different friends, different activities, and different attitudes; different everything. Many times, teens have missed important experiences or events because of their abuse of alcohol or other drugs. In recovery, they have to face the task of socializing while sober or trying a sport that they haven't done before. Teens may worry about returning to school and being behind other kids their own age as well as having to dace up to their "druggie" reputation. Teens may be confused as they realize things aren't quite how they thought they would be. Stopping drug use doesn't put an end to problems. In fact, problems can even seem worse because they aren't being covered up or denied anymore.

When asked what they would like from their parents, teens say listening and understanding.

As teens try to stay away from old using friends they may feel lonely, isolated and bored. Many young people feel angry and resentful that they can't be out "having fun". It's very important for parents to offer support to their teens during this stressful time. It's hard to know, however, what kind of support is needed. Sometimes it takes a lot of work to rebuild communication after a long period of not talking. It is important that it be rebuilt so that issues and feelings can be dealt with openly. Outside help may be needed at the start of recovery to deal with hurts and resentments.

Recovery is a process that continues after the formal "treatment" experience. There can be rocky times ahead as adolescence itself is a time of many changes. It is even harder for teens who have been abusing alcohol or other drugs to turn their lives around. We need to remember that a "slip-up" isn't a disaster waiting to happen. We need to remember the progress that has been made so far, and we need to learn how to practice a new way of handling old problems. To learn new ways, we need to stick to our boundaries, look after ourselves, and pay attention to how we are responding. If, for example, we respond to our child's relapse (old behaviour) in a different way than before, things are not back to the same old ways. If we have a plan, if we talk to and get support from other parents, if we use what we have learned in our own counseling, we have done something different – and that's progress. Also, if we don't allow the current problem to make us forget previous successes, things will likely get back on track sooner.

Young people, like adults, have the need to belong, the need for success, space, recognition, safety, power, and fun. Learning new and healthy ways to meet these needs takes time, practice, and patience. Supporting teens in recovery includes parent's realizing their kids are separate from them. Teens need to make choices and learn from the consequences of these choices. This ability to separate and be separate from our own children makes it possible to take care of ourselves regardless of what these choices might be, and, makes it possible to move forward in our own lives without giving in to alcohol and other drug abuse.