

QUESTIONS ABOUT ADDICTION & RECOVERY

Q- Why do I make daddy so angry when he is drinking?

A-Addiction is a difficult topic to talk about, especially with children. When a child asks about addiction, it tends to revolve around an addict's behavior. Children are naturally curious and, when a child notices a change in behavior, they will ask questions. Young children may not understand the process of addiction just as they do not understand dementia or cancer. Addiction can be explained to young children by talking about it like an illness. For example: "Daddy's brain is sick." "Daddy is sick and his sickness makes him drink." "Daddy is sick and might act in a way that is confusing and hurts our feelings." A child may attribute a parent's behavior under the influence to something they have done. If your child asks if they have caused a parent to drink, use drugs, or be verbally/physically abusive, it is important that your child knows that they are not the cause of the behavior. Use the "Seven Cs of Addiction" to have this discussion-"I didn't **cause** it. I can't **cure** it. I can't **control** it. I can **care** for myself by **communicating** my feelings, making healthy **choices**, and by **celebrating** myself." Also communicate to your child that you are a safe space to share their feelings about what is happening in the family and how it is affecting them. If you think that your child needs more support than you can offer, look into what supports are provided by their school guidance counselor, your place of worship, out in the community, or a mental health professional for help processing the addiction in the family.

Q- Will I have issues with addiction because it runs in my family?

A-This is a common question that children and teens have when there is someone in their family facing an addiction. Fear may prompt this question because they have watched the process of addiction and wonder if it will happen to them. It is important to be honest when talking to your child about addiction. There is a genetic component to addiction and talking about how it may impact your child is crucial to their future and how they will approach drugs and alcohol. Talk to your child about how they may differ from their friends as they get older and are at the age when people begin to experiment. Make sure they are educated on the dangers of drugs and alcohol and the reasons people want to use them. Most people use drugs to feel good and have fun or to help deal with stress and mental health symptoms. When someone uses a highly addictive drug or uses a substance like alcohol or marijuana to "chill out" on a daily basis, a dependency can develop and addiction can result. Discuss alternate options with your child that are healthier and will provide them with long-lasting happiness. Being involved with activities they love, hanging out with friends who are positive influences, having positive coping skills to deal with stress, establishing important goals, and talking to a loved one or professional when they are feeling down are all ways to live a healthy and happy life. Many drugs can affect the brain before it is fully developed around the age of twenty-five. Along with other issues, using an addictive substance, even nicotine, before the brain is fully developed can increase the likelihood of individuals facing issues with addiction. Work with your child to develop a plan on how they will say no to a peer who may want them to experiment. There are plenty of individuals with family members who have faced addiction who do not end up with addiction issues themselves. It is important that your child understand addiction and how they can make smart decisions for their future.

QUESTIONS ABOUT ADDICTION & RECOVERY *(continued)***Q- Why does mommy have to live away from us for a month to get better?**

A-Many children have difficulty understanding why a parent or loved one has to spend time away from them when rehabilitation is needed for an addiction. Before a parent or loved one leaves, explain that they are sick and need to go to stay with doctors so they can get better. It is important to reassure children that the parent is okay and will be safe. When the parent leaves, it is important to provide the child with additional emotional support. Children thrive on consistency. If they have witnessed or been affected by the substance use, a child may be struggling with the lack of consistent behavior from their parent or in their home environment overall. The loss of a parent for several weeks can lead to more confusion. Talk to the child about their feelings and keep communication open. Check in frequently, do not rely on a child to come to you to talk about how the changes are affecting them. It may be necessary to take a child to a mental health professional for additional support.

Q- Why does Uncle Joe act silly when we have parties?

A-This is a very innocent question and a child who asks this question may not be aware of alcohol or drugs and how they can affect our bodies. You can tell your child that Uncle Joe drinks adult beverages called beer and wine and that they have alcohol in them. Relate alcohol to something they may understand. Tell your child that drinking too much alcohol in beer can make people silly just like having too much sugar in candy makes them act silly and hyper.

Q- Why would someone try drugs if they know they are bad for them and they could become addicted?

A-Children can tell you that drugs are bad and may not understand why people use them. People do not try drugs thinking that they will become addicted. Help your child understand that drug use can start with simple experimentation. When someone experiments with a drug and has fun, they are more likely to try it again. Someone may be able to experiment with alcohol or marijuana without experiencing immediate harmful effects; however, some drugs are so highly addictive that one use can start to change your brain chemistry to need that drug. Over a short period of time, someone experimenting and using the drug when they want to is now someone who needs the drug to function and not experience withdrawal symptoms. People can also develop a dependency to drugs like alcohol and marijuana by using it as a negative way to cope. People who deal with constant stress, have experienced trauma, feel uncomfortable around others, are unhappy with themselves, or deal with mental health disorders (especially undiagnosed) may use drugs and alcohol to feel better temporarily and get rid of the negative feelings they are experiencing. Help your child understand that anyone can be affected by addiction and help them develop refusal skills, as well as, discuss healthy coping skills that they can use to deal with stress in their life.

Q- Will dad always be like this?

A-A child who experiences addiction in the family has to face a lot of inconsistency and unpredictable behavior. They may have had a parent relapse after being sober for a time and may feel hopeless when it comes to a parent reaching recovery. Help a child understand that relapse is possible but it is important to remain hopeful. Addiction is a chronic disease but can be managed through treatment and continuous support. Make a comparison to a disease they may better understand. When someone is diagnosed with cancer they have to receive treatments and there is always a chance that it can come back once they are in remission. Like cancer, addiction can be treated through resources such as inpatient or outpatient programs and therapy. Like, cancer, there is always a chance that someone can relapse once they are in recovery. Attending meetings and continuing with therapy are ways to avoid relapse. Make sure that your child knows that they can talk to you openly about their feelings. If needed, contact a mental health professional to help your child process their feelings surrounding addiction.

QUESTIONS ABOUT ADDICTION & RECOVERY *(continued)*

Q- Mommy, why do you have to go to meetings all of the time? Can I come with you?

A-It is hard for young children to understand the upkeep for recovery. Many in recovery must attend frequent meetings to maintain sobriety. If your child asks about your meetings you can relate them to going to the doctor after being sick. You were sick and now you are better but it is important for you to go to meetings to stay healthy just like you go to the doctor for a checkup after you are sick. Reassure your child that you will spend special time with them when you come home.