

Navigating the Treatment System

Realizing that your teen or young adult child needs help for their substance use or addiction can be scary and overwhelming, and you are not alone if you have no idea where to begin. There is no one-size-fits-all answer so it can take a fair amount of research to figure out what type of help your child needs, and how to get it. No matter where you are emotionally, mentally or physically, we're here to help.

[Download Your Child's Treatment Roadmap](#), our step-by-step guide to making the right choices for your child (of any age) and family, and a helpful companion to the information below.

Explore the options

When many people think about treatment for substance use, detox and rehab may come to mind. In reality, detox (detoxification) is not treatment as it addresses just the physical withdrawal symptoms only, and a residential program is just one of a variety of options. Treatment for substance use disorder can take place in different settings (inpatient or outpatient); some are more intense than others.

It helps to learn about [the options available](#), keeping in mind that the program you select should address your child's physical, psychological, emotional and social issues in addition to their substance use.

Having your child assessed by a doctor — discussed below — can help you determine the best type of care for your child.

Assess your needs

Getting the right treatment for your child is a process, and navigating the healthcare system requires careful examination, determination, and some caution. If you've searched online for help or treatment for your loved one, you've likely come across what are advertised as free treatment referral services. These services are often linked to private, for-profit treatment providers. Those providers may offer acceptable treatment, but it's important to check them out before buying a service that could put someone else's profit above the best interests of your family.

Try to schedule an evaluation for your child to determine the best possible care. Evaluations are typically done by independent providers or mental health professionals at outpatient programs. They should include a clinical assessment along with a substance use screening to determine the level of care that's most appropriate. Insurance will probably cover the assessment, but there may be a co-pay or other out-of-pocket costs.

Use the [Safe Locator](#), [ASAM](#) directories, or [Psychology Today](#) to find a provider.

If a clinical evaluation is not an option, the following are important considerations to determine the right treatment for your child. Insurance coverage and benefits may be a deciding factor as well. Click [here](#) to learn more about paying for treatment:

- Ability to address other mental health or physical problems
- Telehealth options
- Transportation and distance from home
- Gender of your child
- Age-appropriateness
- Cultural considerations
- Staff credentials and staff-to-patient ratios
- School or work support
- Family involvement
- Life skills and recreational opportunities
- Use of medications
- After-care planning

It may be helpful to ask for daily and/or weekly programming schedules to see what kinds of counseling and activities are offered and how your child will spend their time.

Finding a provider

Your insurance company may be able to provide you with a list of in-network treatment providers. Often the lists are not specific to the kind of care you may be looking for so it's important to call programs to verify their services.

Partnership to End Addiction and SAFE Project have developed a user-friendly resource for families seeking help, the [SAFE Locator](#). This search tool combines treatment information from a government database with a first-of-its-kind locator for accessing family support services.

For opioid treatment needs, SAMHSA also offers the following:

- [Opioid Treatment Program Directory](#). OTPs, formerly known as methadone clinics, offer treatment to address opioid use, including heroin and prescription pain medication.
- [Buprenorphine Physician & Treatment Locator](#). Also known by the brand name Suboxone, Subutex, Zubsolv and others, buprenorphine is one of several types of medications to address opioid use disorders. Buprenorphine is regulated such that physicians and programs must receive authorization to dispense it. Use this locator to find authorized programs near you.

Once you have a list of potential treatment providers, it's important to call and [ask lots of questions](#) to determine who can best meet your family's needs.

As your search narrows, remember to cross reference what providers tell you with your insurance company. A treatment or program may say they take insurance, but you'll need to verify that your insurance company will authorize the type of services selected for the specific program you are considering.

Starting treatment

When it's time for your child to begin treatment, it's important to stay involved, connected and aware of everything that can happen. After all, even successful journeys will have a few bumps in the road.

The following are a few things to be prepared for:

- **There may be a wait list.** If you find yourself in this situation, consider calling your state's Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services (or the equivalent agency) to see if they can direct you to available treatment programs. Word-of-mouth in support communities is one of the best resources for learning where or how to get treatment more quickly. In some cases, simply being persistent and calling often can help your loved one move up on the list.
- **Make sure your child signs a release.** Absent such consent, the facility becomes bound by HIPPA protocol, and they'll be unable to share information with you.
- **There will be a full intake process.** This should include questions about your child's drug use, your family, your child's medical history, educational history and mental health. Your child and their belongings may also be searched upon arrival. For some this can feel like an invasion of privacy, but it's necessary and important to ensure a safe environment.

Continuing care

Treatment is not over after discharge; rather that is when much of the hard work is really just beginning. Aftercare should be a part of any treatment plan. Families need a successful discharge plan that can be realistically implemented.

The following are important elements to consider for your child's initial recovery plan.

- **Support group or recovery coach.** Your child will need help and support learning how to navigate life without substance use.
- **Ongoing counseling.** Building on the foundation of treatment, counseling can strengthen coping and life skills, address triggers and offer a place to process struggles.
- **Living situation.** Safe and stable housing is critical whether in the family home, with a relative or friend, or in some form of sober housing.
- **Medication.** Your child may require the support of an addiction psychiatrist to address substance use and other mental health issues. Adherence to the medication plan and an open dialog with the provider are key.
- **Naloxone for opioids.** If your child is in treatment for heroin and other opioids, be sure to get naloxone (Narcan) and know how to use it.

- **Structure.** Building a life around school, work, hobbies socializing and other healthy activities can lead to better outcomes.
- **Family support.** Reinforcing healthy behaviors, setting limits, using listening skills and attending your own support groups can help your child succeed in recovery.