

TEEN SUBSTANCE USE

guide for support & treatment options



About this guide

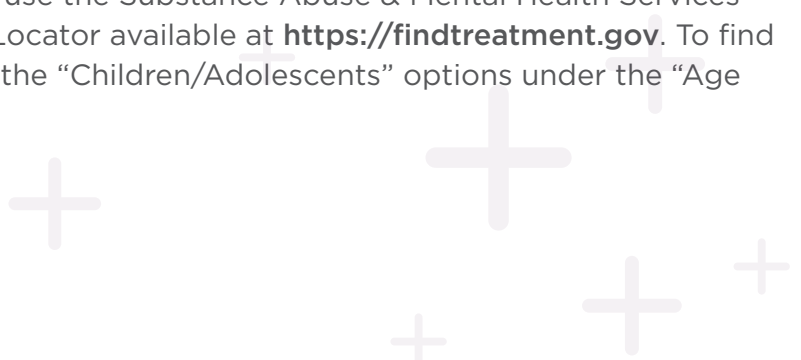
This guide provides a brief overview of support and treatment options for teens experiencing substance use.

Options listed in **blue** indicate low time requirements (typically 1 hour per week). Options listed in **green** indicate moderate to high time requirements (typically 9 or more hours per week). Options listed in **pink** indicate maximum time requirements (typically 24/7 care with the teen living at the facility).



In general, options that require higher time commitments are considered more intensive than options that require lower time commitments. The duration of support/treatment typically depends on the needs of the teen and the progress they are making while receiving support/treatment.

Specific organizations and provider names are not included in this guide since services offered for teens frequently evolve or change. To find specific, up-to-date information about support & treatment providers, please use the Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Treatment Locator available at <https://findtreatment.gov>. To find programs specifically for teens, select the “Children/Adolescents” options under the “Age Groups Accepted” filter.



Family Support

Might also be called: family coaching, family program

Purpose: Helps family members understand reasons behind their teen's substance use, become aware of their own thoughts and feelings about their teen's use, and work on communication skills and behavior tools to help influence their teen's substance use in a positive way.

Highlights:

- Family members can receive support regardless of teen's involvement.
- Some programs allow teen involvement if teen is willing to participate.
- Could be offered as individual appointments (one family attends) or support group sessions with other families (several families attend).

Peer Support

Might also be called: peer mentoring, peer coaching, peer services

Purpose: Provides teens with therapeutic interactions with a young adult who has lived experience with substance use. Peer support is intended to inspire hope that substance use recovery is possible.

Highlights:

- Peer support people are trained and certified to offer support and assistance.
- Teens are given the opportunity to participate in and make decisions about the activities conducted, which may include individual advocacy, education, and development of natural supports.



Outpatient Therapy

Might also be called: counseling, psychotherapy

Purpose: Teens meet with a trained professional (therapist, counselor, clinical social worker) to work on problematic behaviors, beliefs, feelings, and relationship issues related to their substance use. Reducing or stopping substance use is often presented as a goal of treatment.

Highlights:

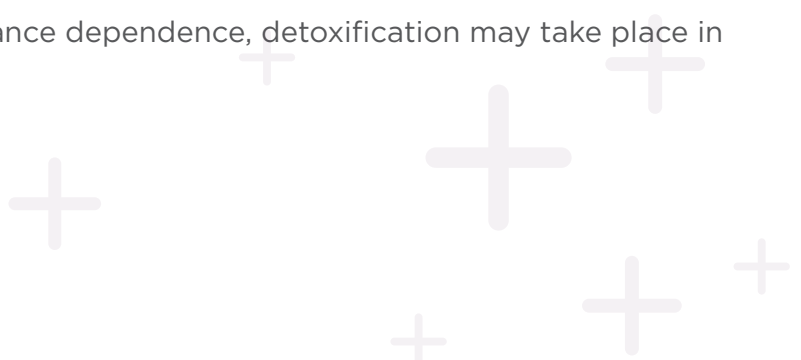
- Could be offered as individual appointments, or in a group setting with other teens present.
- Some therapists/counselors offer mental health therapy in addition to substance use therapy. This is often called “co-occurring” or “dual diagnosis” treatment.
- Could be offered as in-person or virtual appointments.

Medication Treatment for Substance Use

Purpose: Provides teens with medications to reduce withdrawal symptoms and/or reduce cravings.

Highlights:

- Different medications exist for different types of substance use.
- Some medications, such as Nicotine Replacement Therapy, can be purchased over the counter by someone age 18+.
- Some medications, such as medications for Opioid Use Disorder, require the teen to be seen by a medical doctor.
- Some substances, like alcohol and benzodiazepines, may require medication for safe detoxification.
- Depending on the severity of substance dependence, detoxification may take place in inpatient or outpatient settings.



Multisystemic Therapy (MST)

Might also be called: in-home services

Purpose: Aims to prevent teens from out-of-home placement due to problematic behaviors, including substance use. Trained therapists work with the teen and family to improve family and peer relations, school functioning and neighborhood interactions.

Highlights:

- Teens with chronic, serious emotional and behavioral problems, such as criminal behavior, aggressive behavior, substance use, running away, truancy and academic problems are accepted.
- Families are typically referred through child welfare, juvenile justice, school systems, and mental health professionals.
- Any family, with a teen that meets the program criteria, can self-refer.

Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP)

Purpose: Provides teens with group, individual, and family therapy sessions to learn skills and receive support for problematic substance use. Teens continue to attend their own schools during the day and return to their homes in the evening.

Highlights:

- Usually 3 group sessions per week – each usually 3 hours in length.
- Regular one-on-one sessions with a therapist and/or psychiatrist.
- Can serve as a “step down” from more intensive levels of care, such as inpatient hospitalization.
- Can serve as a “step up” from less intensive levels of care, such as outpatient therapy.



Partial Hospitalization Program (PHP)

Purpose: Provides teens with an intensity of treatment similar to that available on an inpatient unit, in a less restrictive, community-based setting. Adolescents participate in consistent, structured substance use treatment while maintaining their usual living arrangements with their families in their communities.

Highlights:

- Usually 6-8 hours per day, 3-5 days per week
- Groups sessions and regular one-on-one sessions with a therapist and/or psychiatrist.
- Can serve as a “step down” from more intensive levels of care, such as inpatient hospitalization.
- Can serve as a “step up” from less intensive levels of care, such as outpatient therapy or intensive outpatient programs.



Teen Residential Treatment

Might also be called: rehab, placement, therapeutic boarding school

Purpose: Provides teens with intensive treatment for emotional, behavioral, educational, and substance use issues. A residential treatment program is generally the next step for teens who do not respond to an outpatient program or need more intensive treatment following inpatient psychiatric care.

Highlights:

- Teens live at the residential treatment facility while receiving care.
- Scheduled activities typically include individual therapy and group therapy sessions.
- Treatment provided typically includes evidence-based therapy models such as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy (TF-CBT), and experiential therapy.

Therapeutic Wilderness Programs

Might also be called: adventure therapy, wilderness camp, nature-based therapy

Purpose: Teens participate in outdoor activities, therapeutic interventions, and collaborative group experiences to help address problems related to substance use and other behavioral issues.

Highlights:

- Teens live in the wilderness with the program's staff and other teens.
- Common activities include individual and group therapy, camping, hiking, backpacking, and cooking.
- Allows teens to safely experience natural consequences and form a sense of community with other teens in the program.



Inpatient Hospitalization

Purpose: Provides stabilization of severe mental health symptoms so that teens can participate in other treatment options when they are discharged.

Highlights:

- Typically considered the most intensive of all treatment options.
- Provides a safe environment for teens experiencing symptoms such as suicidal thoughts and self-injury.
- Individual and group therapy are typically offered, but full remission of symptoms rarely occurs before discharge.
- Ongoing treatment is crucial for maintaining progress and further relief from symptoms.



Additional Options

Additional support & treatment options, not described in this guide, exist for teens experiencing substance use. These additional options include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Mutual help groups (AA, NA, SMART Recovery)
- Rehab (see Teen Residential Treatment section on page 7)
- Sober housing
- Holding an “intervention”
- Involuntary treatment (see more about this in the next section)
- Juvenile justice programs

Involuntary Treatment

Teens who are not willing to voluntarily participate in substance use treatment, may qualify for involuntary substance use treatment under Pennsylvania Law Act 53. Act 53 allows parents/legal guardians of a minor, between ages 12-17, to petition the court to order involuntary substance use treatment for their child. At the Act 53 hearing, the judge will decide if treatment is needed based on the evidence presented to the court. If the child is found to be in need of treatment, a court order will be written, and arrangements will be made for the child’s treatment to begin as soon as possible. The court will then monitor the child’s progress and schedule a review hearing 45 days after the initial hearing.

Researching Your Options

It’s important to research any treatment/support option that you are considering for your teen. The Partnership to End Addiction offers free tools for parents to navigate treatment options, including their Questions to Ask Treatment Programs workbook. This list of questions can help guide your conversation with treatment program staff in helping you decide which program is the best fit for your child and family. Go to <https://drugfree.org/> and search “workbook” to download a free copy.

