

Substance Use Disorder

Medical Term for Addiction

Gary Schafer, Author –His son Eric died from a fentanyl overdose. He struggled with addiction for over 10 years. Eric was clean and sober for over 2 years before his death.

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2023 Study by the U.S. National Survey on Drugs Use and Health

- 48.5 million Americans aged 12 and older, battled a substance use disorder in the past year
- 10.2% of Americans age 12 and older, had an alcohol use disorder in the past year
- 27.2 million Americans aged 12 and older, reported battling a drug use disorder
- 7.5 million Americans aged 12 and older, struggled with both alcohol and drug use disorder simultaneously
- 20.4 million adults suffer from both a mental health disorder and a substance use disorder, or co-occurring disorder in the past year

Eric's Story



Eric was a funny, enjoyable, good-natured kid. Played hockey and had many friends

Eric started experimenting with **alcohol** and **marijuana** in high school

It eventually led to using **opioid pain killers**

It progressed from that point to where we had to take **desperate action**

We experienced that addiction is stronger than our love

Eric struggled for over 10 years with SUD

Eric was in recovery for over 2 years and in a span of 3 weeks he relapsed, overdosed, and died on April 8, 2015 at the age of 29



Gary's Story

We, as parents, handled everything wrong originally. We were in over our heads

We handled it as a **“behavior”** problem. It's not. There's an **invisible line** and once it's crossed you cannot go back

We tried to address it by using **threats, shaming**, and other methods. We tried to control Eric

We **didn't understand** about the disease of addiction until Eric attended Henry Ford Maplegrove

We started attending support groups for our well-being

I call it my 3-legged stool for my recovery: education about the disease, my recovery, and faith

We needed to learn about **codependency, enabling, detaching with love, boundaries, and other “tools”**

After learning about addiction, we as parents, had to make very **“difficult”** decisions

We learned that our recovery was just as important to Eric as his own recovery

WHAT IS ADDICTION

Chronic condition that involves a compulsive need to perform an activity, even when it has **negative** consequences

It's a **complex** brain disorder with many causes including **trauma, brain chemistry, environmental factors, and social influences**. It becomes an ongoing **struggle** between **acting on** and **resisting impulses**

Areas Impacted

Physical

Alertness
Sleep patterns
Change in appetite
Weight loss/gain.
Low personal hygiene

Emotional

Defensive
Angry
Mood swings
Remorseful
Suicidal
Low self-esteem

Social

Changes in Peers
Withdrawal
Avoid person who cares
Negative relationships.

Spiritual

Lack goals
No sense of purpose
Lives against moral beliefs

Behavior

Lying
Illegal behavior
Violence
Lethargy
Low motivation
Quick change in energy

Characteristics of SUD

- SUD is the persistent use of substances, despite the potential harm and adverse consequences to self and others
- A disease without a cure. An addicted person can be in recovery and manage the disease, but he is never “recovered.”
- Number 1 factor that can lead to addiction is the genetic predisposition. Other major causes are mental health disorders, family systems and parental guidance/knowledge, peer pressure, trauma (such as physical or sexual abuse), social environment, and stress.
- Addiction is a progressive disease and will continue to get worse. The disease never regresses; it waits. If a person is in recovery and uses again, the addiction picks up where it left off

Trauma, Pain, and Our Brain

- **Trauma** is a **distressing** or **disturbing** experience that overwhelms a person's ability to cope
- To understand **addiction** is to understand it to be an attempt to **soothe** the **pain** imposed by **trauma**. We try to avoid pain because it's a natural human instinct to **seek out comfort** and **avoid discomfort**
- **Survival Instinct:** pain often signals harm or danger, so avoiding it helps protect us from injury or illness.
- **Emotional Well-being:** emotional pain can be distressing and overwhelming, so avoiding it can help us maintain mental and emotional stability
- **Avoidance of Suffering:** Pain can lead to suffering and can disrupt our quality of life, so avoiding it helps us feel more at ease and content
- **Adaptive Function:** avoiding pain can help us make better choices and avoid harmful situations, contributing to overall well-being

Addiction and Our Brain

- The **reward system** of our brain developed as a way to reinforce behaviors we need to survive, i.e.: eating, hydrating, exercise, sleeping. These are **natural** rewards which release **dopamine**, which in turn releases a jolt of **satisfaction**
- Dopamine sends signals that something **important** and **pleasurable** is happening that needs to be remembered, which is why it becomes easy to **repeat** the activity **without thought**
- Addiction develops when the **pleasure circuits** in the brain get overwhelmed, and **brain chemistry changes**. Substances create **surges** of dopamine, or the joy chemical, so now the brain is **actively seeking** out the substance to get that feeling

How Substances work in the Brain

- When someone uses substances, the brain gets **overwhelmed** with strong signals, like someone **shouting loudly** in their ear.
- To handle this, the brain tries to "**turn down the volume**" by making **fewer** of the chemicals needed for pleasure
- Because of this, normal enjoyable activities **don't feel** as **good** anymore. This makes it harder for the person to find joy in everyday life **without the substance**
- Achieving that pleasurable sensation becomes increasingly important, but **tolerance** is built and **more** of the substance is needed to generate the feeling

Why it's Hard to Stop

- **Brain Chemistry:** alters brain chemistry, brain becomes dependent on reward of SUD
- **Neuroplasticity:** the brain's ability to change can work against recovery as it rewires the brain's reward system making the desire to use very strong
- **Habit and Routine:** substance use becomes deeply ingrained in daily routine so breaking routine becomes very challenging
- **Social and Environmental Influences:** if a person is surrounded by others who use or who encourage use, quitting can be harder
- **Stigma and Shame:** both can discourage individuals from seeking help or admitting there's a problem
- **Psychological Factors:** substance is used to cope with underlying psychological issues, making it harder to quit

What You Can do for Someone Suffering from SUD

- **DON'T TRY TO CHANGE, CONVINCe, BRIBE, CONTROL, COERCE OR BEG THEM**
- **Educate Yourself:** learn about addiction, its effects, and the recovery process. Understanding can help you offer more effective support and avoid unintentional harm
- **Encourage Professional Help:** gently encourage your loved one to seek professional help from doctors, therapists, or addiction specialists, go to family therapy
 - Don't seek advice from individuals unfamiliar with SUD. While they may mean well, they do not have the knowledge and experience to help
- **Be Supportive and Non-Judgmental:** show empathy and compassion, avoid criticism or blame, which can lead to shame
- **Set Boundaries:** establish clear boundaries to protect your well-being and be clear about what behaviors are unacceptable

What You Can do for Someone Suffering from SUD

- **Open Communication:** maintain open and honest communication, share concerns and feelings without accusing or blaming, express desire to see them healthy
- **Be a Positive Role Model:** demonstrate healthy behaviors and coping strategies to show it's possible to live a healthy life without substances
- **Interventions:** work with a professional to have a structured conversation with your loved one, where the focus is on encouraging treatment, rather than causing conflict
- **Understand Stages of Change:** Denial – no intent to change, considering change, preparing to change, taking action, and maintaining change
- **Understand Stages of Recovery:** stabilization (1st year), deepening (2nd year - increased commitment), connectedness (years 3-5), Integration (years 6-10, automatic use of recovery tools), Fulfillment (10 years and beyond (living in peace, discovering life purpose))

Terms to Know

- **Codependency:** “One who has let another person’s behavior affect him or her and who is obsessed with controlling that person’s behavior.” by Melody Beattie, author of Codependent No More
- **Detach with Love (Detachment)** - means to step back from a relationship or situation while still caring about the person involved, compassion, boundaries, avoiding control, offering emotional support
- **Enabling:** taking responsibility for the destructive behavior of another so they don’t have to deal with the consequences of their own behavior
- **Let go and let God:** surrendering control of a situation and trusting God

Prevention

- **Self-Esteem:**
 - Use positive reinforcement
 - **Separate the child from the behavior.** You love the child, you dislike the behavior
 - Ask questions about your child's behavior or activities when you're not present
 - Empower children to think for themselves
- **Physical and Mental Health:**
 - Stress the importance of creating healthy, lifelong habits
 - Teach healthy ways to relax, cope, and combat boredom
 - **Educate children about their family history of SUD (highest risk factor)**
 - Educate children that the brain is not prepared to handle alcohol and marijuana until the age of 21. Using substances before the age of 21 increases risk
- **Friendships and Relationships:**
 - Teach them who the "helping people" are in their home, school, and community
 - Call parents of their friends, inquire about their rules and environment
 - Encourage healthy friendships. Give permission to end unhealthy friendships
 - Discuss difficult situations. **Ask "what would you do if..."**

Prevention

- **Rules and Legal Issues:**
 - Give a clear message that no illegal drug use is allowed in your family
 - Raise children to believe that it's your family rule to follow the law. Inform them of the consequences of failure to do so
 - Set rules for your child in advance. When age-appropriate, have them participate in setting the rules
 - Hold children accountable for their behavior. **Do not enable**
- **Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs:**
 - Teach information about labels on prescriptions. Importance of not sharing medications
 - Lock up alcohol and prescription medications properly
 - Be careful not to use alcohol or marijuana to intoxication where children are present
 - **Do not allow children to taste alcohol or sample marijuana. Sends a message you approve**
- **Media Influences:**
 - If you provide a cell phone, set rules in advance. Cannot change passwords on device
 - Phone should be turned in each evening. Not allowed in the bedroom. Same for all electronics
 - Discuss internet safety

Prevention

- **Teens and Substance Use:**

- Greet your teen when they come home. Hug, kiss, and a sniff. Also look for unusual smells like mints, gum, etc. Look at pupil size and whites of their eyes
- If your teen is being driven by someone else, you expect them to report if they are intoxicated. Never drive with someone who is under the influence
- If your teen has been drinking or using drugs, do not let them go to sleep unsupervised
- If you suspect substance use, it is your **right** and **responsibility** to search the bedroom, car, backpack, purse, etc.
- **While it is common to be in denial and assume alcohol or drug use is a rite of passage for teens, your inaction may allow the use to develop into SUD**
- Early intervention prevents the disease of SUD from progressing
- Maintain open communication

- **Parent Education:**

- **Educate yourself** so you can teach your children and be able to discuss
- Learn about all drugs and the signs and symptoms of drug use
- Form a coalition of parents to supervise parties, share information, and support each other
- Understand today's marijuana is much stronger than our teenage years (THC)

Signs and Symptoms of Substance use

Physical and Behavior Signs:

- Loud speech, slurred speech, changes in tone of voice
- Bragging
- Overly animated, entertaining, friendly
- Peculiar odors of marijuana, alcohol, solvents on body, clothing, in the house or car
- Presence of drug paraphernalia in environment or laundry (seeds, leaves, butts in pockets)
- Use of small baggies, cigarette papers, unusual small containers, scales
- Use of eye drops, room deodorizers, or incense
- Makes inappropriate comments
- Bad behavior, swearing
- Inappropriate sexual advances
- Says things that do not make sense
- Weight loss
- Drowsy, falling asleep
- Bloodshot, glassy eyes, change in pupil size
- Lack of focus and eye contact
- Clumsy, uncoordinated, stumbling, falling down, bumping into or dropping things
- Decline in physical appearance (lack of alertness, decrease in neatness and personal hygiene)

Signs and Symptoms of Substance use

Environmental Signs:

- Missing money or property, selling of personal items
- Change in school performance (drop in grades, attendance, disciplinary problems)
- Keeping secrets about friends or activities, change in friendships
- Lying or denying
- Obnoxious or mean
- Changes in mood (aggressive anger, uncaring attitude, crying, depressed, argumentative)
- Major changes in behavior and personality (loss of motivation or interest)
- Difficulty concentrating, understanding, remembering
- Rambling conversation, loss of train of thought, slow response to questions
- Change in family relations (withdrawal, hostility, marked increase in family arguments)
- Difficulty following rules / limits
- Bloodshot, glassy eyes, change in pupil size
- Involvement in illegal activities or delinquent behavior
- Refusal to take a drug test or be tested for alcohol use

Website

ericstory.com

[Link to YouTube Channel with Additional Videos](#)

- **Articles:**

- Understanding Substance Use Disorder
- Top 7 Teen Substance Use Trends Parents Need to Know (Partnership to End Addiction – drugfree.org)
- Signs of Drug Use in Teens (Partnership to End Addiction – drugfree.org)
- Dr Rober John, MD, DDS – Work together to prevent substance abuse in communities (The Detroit News - Article, October 25, 2024)
- The Grief of an Overdose Death (Partnership to End Addiction – drugfree.org)
- Creating a Plan – realizing your child has a substance use problem (Partnership to End Addiction – drugfree.org)
- Is Your Child at Risk – a Substance Use Risk Assessment (Partnership to End Addiction – drugfree.org)

Q & A