

How to Navigate the Addiction Treatment System

For most people, “treatment” for substance use conjures images of detox or a residential rehab facility. In reality, detox (detoxification) is not treatment, and a residential program is just one of a variety of options. Treatment can take place in different forms, settings and for different lengths of time.

The approach to treating addiction is generally similar regardless of substance.

However, treatment is typically individualized to some degree based on the characteristics of the patient — programs usually address an individual’s physical, psychological, emotional and social issues in addition to his or her alcohol or drug use — as well as the type of substance itself, as in the case of [medication-assisted treatment for opioids](#).

Unfortunately, when it comes to addiction and substance use disorders, just as with other health conditions, there are no guarantees for the perfect treatment, and it can be difficult to access quality care. Addiction is a manageable but chronic disease, just like diabetes or asthma. Because it is a chronic, relapsing disease, treatment should not be approached as a way to “cure” your loved one. It is a first step in helping your child learn how to manage his or her addiction.

How to Find the Right Treatment

Getting the right treatment for your child is a process and navigating the current systems in place requires due diligence and perseverance. There are services that may offer to find a treatment program for you at no charge; be careful as there are unscrupulous people out there who will pretend to have your best interests at heart, but are more interested in their own financial benefit ([see our note on referral services](#)). We are a nonprofit, and [our parent services](#) are made available for the sole purpose of helping you find the best solutions for your child and your family.

EDUCATE YOURSELF

One of the most important things you can do to help your child is to educate yourself about substance use disorders, what quality treatment consists of, and the types of programs available. Using the various resources offered here on this site is a great start.

GET A SCREENING ASSESSMENT

In order to determine the severity of the issue and an appropriate level of care, you may wish to have a substance use counselor take an assessment. It should include a thorough look at the extent of your child’s drug and alcohol use, your child’s mental and physical health as well as personal, medical and family history.

NETWORK

Talk to the people around you. You may feel like keeping your child’s drug or alcohol problem a secret, but you shouldn’t. Addiction is a chronic disease, not a moral failing on your part or your child’s part. The people you’re hiding from may be the same people who could connect you to needed help, offer support or a shoulder to cry on.

UNDERSTAND THE OPTIONS

There are many types of treatment services available, in a variety of settings, including outpatient, inpatient, and residential. And none of it is one-size-fits-all. Before you make any decisions, [know the options](#).