

UNDERSTANDING SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER (SUDs)

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KEY TAKE-AWAYS:

Disease Concept/ Model: chronic, treatable, potentially fatal disease. Similarities to other chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, hypertension

“Addiction is a primary, chronic disease of brain reward, motivation, memory and related circuitry. Dysfunction in these circuits leads to characteristic biological, psychological, social and spiritual manifestations. This is reflected in an individual pathologically pursuing reward and/or relief by substance use and other behaviors.”(American Society of Addiction Medicine)

Prevalence: Lifetime prevalence of substance use issues (U.S.) falls in the 8-12% range. U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH): 10% lifetime prevalence. About 13% of Americans reported increased use during COVID-19 pandemic.

Morbidity

- Annual tobacco-related deaths approaching 500,000 (U.S.) (CDC)
- Annual overdose deaths now over 90,000 (approx. 70% opioid-related) (U.S.) (CDC)
- Annual alcohol-related deaths over 90,000 (U.S.) (CDC)
- Diagnosis = Substance Use Disorder (SUD). Specific categories of diagnosis, such as alcohol, cannabis, stimulant, cannabis, tobacco, opioid.
- Diagnostic Criteria (DSM-5)
- A problematic pattern of use leading to clinically significant impairment or distress, as manifested by at least two of the criteria, occurring within a 12-month period. Examples of criteria include elevated tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, craving, decrease functioning in work/school/ family due to use, use in dangerous situations, and difficulty stopping or cutting down.
- Specifiers: Mild (2-3 criteria met)/Moderate (4-5 criteria met)/Severe (6 or more met)

Other signs and symptoms

- Loss of Control: inability to consistently predict time, place, amount, duration (look for use at inappropriate times and/or in inappropriate places)
- Legal involvement: no longer included in DSM criteria. Potential for cultural bias

Co-Occurring Disorders

- Having a substance use disorder as well as another significant disorder or condition
- Usually used to describe another mental health disorder (depression, bipolar, ADHD, PTSD)
- Best to be treated concurrently, in an integrated manner

Recovery

- Sometimes referred to as remission.
- Avoid stigmatizing language such as “reformed,” “dried out,” or “on the wagon”
- Lifelong vigilance and monitoring, such as with other chronic diseases/conditions

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- How could you build understanding with a dismissive parent or staff member who described substance use disorders as a choice?
- Were there any statistics related to substance use that surprised you? How could you use this knowledge to assist in your prevention efforts?
- Do you know the prevalence of substance use in your school community? You can view your school division data on the [Virginia Department of Health Webpage](#).
- The DSM-5 defines the characteristics of a Substance Use Disorder ([DSM-5 Criteria for Substance Use Disorder](#)), the webinar reviews these. While diagnosis is outside the realm of the school counselors how can we use this information to inform our actions and interventions?
- How can you help the family of someone suffering from SUDs understand and separate the behavior of someone suffering with SUDs from the person themselves? (That actions that occur under the influence are a symptom of the disorder).
- How can you use this understanding of SUDs when working with a student whose family member is suffering from SUDs?
- “SUDs are treatable... however, addiction is not seen as a curable condition;” meaning, it requires a life-long management process. How can you build support systems around a student to assist them in planning long-term management?
- What counseling tools do you need to employ when working with students suffering with SUDs?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- [Virginia Department of Education Resource Document on Substance Abuse Prevention \(2021\)](#)
- [American School Counselor Association: A School Counselor's Role in Substance Abuse Prevention](#)
- [Lock and Talk Virginia: Access to Free Lock Boxes for Medicine](#)
- [SAMHSA Treatment Locator](#)
- [Alcoholics Anonymous](#)
- [Narcotics Anonymous](#)
- [Al-Anon Family Groups](#)
- [SMART Recovery](#)
- [Faces and Voices of Recovery](#)
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#)
- [National Institute on Drug Abuse](#)
- [American Society of Addiction Medicine](#)
- [Addiction Technology Transfer Network](#)
- [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.). American Psychological Association (2013)

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