



Drug Abuse: Signs, Symptoms & What to Do Next

By: Doreen Lockwood, program director, Chemical Dependency Treatment & Prevention Services, Putnam Family & Community Services

Tune in to Comcast Channel 8 on Friday, September 26th at 7pm to view a broadcast on the Heroin Epidemic in Putnam County, including an interview with Putnam Family & Community Services (PFCS) Executive Director, Diane Russo, Program Director of Chemical Dependency Treatment & Prevention Services, PFCS, Doreen Lockwood and Susan Salomone, co-founder, Drug Crisis in Our Backyard.

According to Shatterproof.org, 22 million people struggle with addiction every day, and the [Heroin Epidemic](#) is gaining momentum across the Hudson Valley, including Putnam County, at an alarming rate. Consequently, [Putnam Family & Community Services](#) (PFCS) has seen a significant rise in the number of individuals seeking treatment for drug addiction, particularly among younger adults and teens between the ages of 18 and 34.

The greater availability and use of prescription drugs, specifically opiates, such as Opana, Vicodin, morphine and Percocet, has contributed to street use and abuse of these substances. Because these drugs have become more restricted of late, availability has been limited and the law of supply and demand has taken hold on the street where one pill can cost as much as \$80. This high cost is largely

unaffordable by drug users. Therefore, a cheaper alternative has been sought out, making heroin a popular and powerfully addictive substitute.

If you are concerned that a friend, family member or other loved one may be abusing drugs, it's critical to take early action before drug use turns to drug addiction. The National Council on Alcohol and Drug Dependence (NCADD) cites universal signs, symptoms and suggested actions you can take as a means of intervention with a loved one who is at risk.

Warning Signs:

The use and abuse of alcohol and drugs are serious issues that should not be ignored or minimized and we should not sit back and hope they just go away. If left untreated, use and abuse can develop into drug dependence or alcoholism. As a result, it is important to recognize the signs and symptoms of alcohol and drug abuse early. If you're worried that your son or daughter might be abusing alcohol or drugs, here are some of the warning signs to look for:

1. Physical and health warning signs of drug abuse

- Eyes that are bloodshot or pupils that are smaller or larger than normal.
- Frequent nosebleeds could be related to snorted drugs (meth or cocaine)
- Changes in appetite or sleep patterns. Sudden weight loss or weight gain.
- Seizures without a history of epilepsy
- Deterioration in personal grooming or physical appearance.
- Impaired coordination, injuries/accidents/bruises that they won't or can't tell you about- they don't know how they got hurt
- Unusual smells on breath, body, or clothing.
- Shakes, tremors, incoherent or slurred speech, impaired or unstable coordination.

2. Behavioral signs of alcohol or drug abuse

- Skipping class, declining grades, getting in trouble at school
- Drop in attendance and performance at work- loss of interest in extracurricular activities, hobbies, sports or exercise-decreased motivation
- Complaints from co-workers, supervisors, teachers or classmates
- Missing money, valuables, prescription or prescription drugs, borrowing and stealing money
- Acting isolated, silent, withdrawn, engaging in secretive or suspicious behaviors
- Clashes with family values and beliefs
- Preoccupation with alcohol and drug-related lifestyle in music, clothing and posters
- Demanding more privacy, locking doors and avoiding eye contact
- Sudden change in relationships, friends, favorite hangouts, and hobbies.
- Frequently getting into trouble (arguments, fights, accidents, illegal activities)
- Using incense, perfume, air freshener to hide smell of smoke or drugs
- Using eye drops to mask bloodshot eyes and dilated pupils

3. Psychological warning signs of alcohol or drug abuse

- Unexplained, confusing change in personality and/or attitude.
- Sudden mood changes, irritability, angry outbursts or laughing at nothing.
- Periods of unusual hyperactivity or agitation.
- Lack of motivation; inability to focus, appears lethargic or "spaced out."
- Appears fearful, withdrawn, anxious, or paranoid, with no apparent reason.

Signs and symptoms of alcoholism and drug dependence:

Alcoholism and drug dependence involve all the symptoms of alcohol and drug abuse, but also involve another element: physical dependence- tolerance and withdrawal.

1. Tolerance:

Tolerance means that, over time, they need more alcohol or drugs to feel the same effect. Do they drink or use drugs more than they used to? Do they drink or use drugs more than other people without showing obvious signs of intoxication?

2. Withdrawal:

As the effect of the alcohol or drugs wears off the person may experience withdrawal symptoms: anxiety or jumpiness; shakiness or trembling; sweating, nausea and vomiting, insomnia, depression, irritability, fatigue or loss of appetite and headaches. Do they drink or use drugs to steady the nerves, stop the shakes in the morning? Drinking or drug use to relieve or avoid withdrawal symptoms is a sign of alcoholism and addiction.

In severe cases, withdrawal from alcohol can be life-threatening and involve hallucinations, confusion, seizures, fever, and agitation. These symptoms can be dangerous and should be managed by a physician specifically trained and experienced in dealing with alcoholism and addiction.

3. Loss of Control:

Drinking or drugging more than they wanted to for longer than they intended, or despite telling themselves that they wouldn't do it this time.

4. Desire to Stop - But Can't:

They have a persistent desire to cut down or stop their alcohol or drug use, but all efforts to stop and stay stopped, have been unsuccessful.

5. Neglecting Other Activities:

They are spending less time on activities that used to be important to them (hanging out with family and friends, exercising- going to the gym, pursuing your hobbies or other interests) because of the use of alcohol or drugs.

6. Alcohol or Drugs Take Up Greater Time, Energy and Focus:

They spend a lot of time drinking, thinking about it, or recovering from its effects. They have few, if any, interests, social or community involvements that don't revolve around the use of alcohol or drugs.

7. Continued Use Despite Negative Consequences:

They continue to drink or use drugs even though they know it's causing problems. As an example, they realize that their alcohol or drug use is interfering with their ability to do their job, is damaging their marriage, making their problems worse, or causing health problems, but they continue to drink or use.

If you see some or all of these warning signs, or witness any of the symptoms noted, the time to act is **now**. It may feel so overwhelming that it would be easier to ignore it, but in the end that will be more damaging to all involved...the person at risk, family members and you.

[PFCS Chemical Dependency Services](#) are dedicated to the philosophy that addiction is a treatable disease. [Contact us](#) for more information about our treatment options, as well as other resources that can help you and your loved one overcome the dangers of substance abuse.
