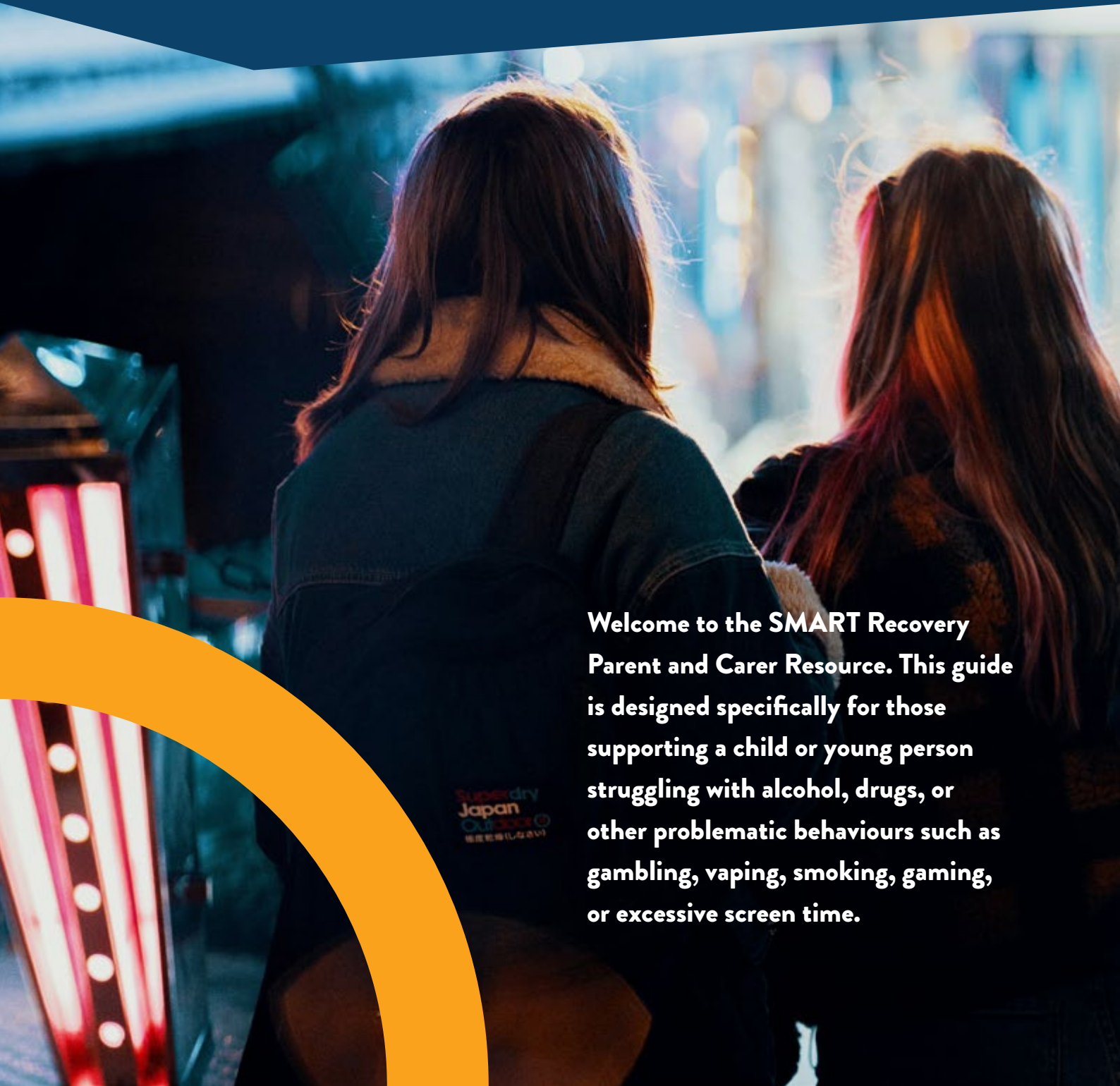




Parents & Carers

A photograph of two young women with long hair, seen from behind, walking through a brightly lit night market or festival. The background is filled with colorful lights and blurred figures. A large, curved yellow graphic element is in the bottom left corner.

Welcome to the SMART Recovery Parent and Carer Resource. This guide is designed specifically for those supporting a child or young person struggling with alcohol, drugs, or other problematic behaviours such as gambling, vaping, smoking, gaming, or excessive screen time.

Why SMART Recovery Works for Parents and Carers:

- 1. Peer Support:** Connect with other parents in similar situations. Share experiences, reduce feelings of isolation, and build a network of understanding and support.
- 2. Practical Tools:** Access evidence-based tools and strategies to help manage your child's behaviours and support their recovery journey.
- 3. Structured Approach:** Follow a structured, goal-oriented program that empowers you to take proactive steps in managing your family's challenges.
- 4. Focus on Positivity:** Maintain a hopeful outlook, which is crucial for staying motivated and resilient during tough times.

We recognise that supporting a child with problematic behaviours presents unique challenges. This resource, created in partnership with the Link Foundation, aims to provide the tailored support and strategies you need.

What This Resource Offers:

- Specific information and targeted tools to help you navigate complex emotions.
- Enhanced communication techniques to better connect with your child.
- Effective strategies to cope with the additional stressors of having a child in your care who is struggling with problematic behaviours.

We hope this resource helps you find the support and guidance you need to support your child's recovery.

**Warm regards,
The SMART Recovery Team**



Common Issues Parents Face

Parents of youth struggling with alcohol, drug dependency, or other problematic behaviours often encounter several common issues:

Emotional Distress: It's normal to feel intense emotions like guilt, shame, anger, frustration, and helplessness.

Communication Challenges: Keeping open and effective communication can be tough, especially if your child is secretive or hostile.

Boundary Setting: Finding a balance between establishing healthy boundaries and maintaining a positive parent-child relationship can be challenging.

Understanding AOD: A lack of knowledge about alcohol and other drugs (AOD), their effects, and the best ways to support your child's recovery can be overwhelming.

Self-Care: Parents often neglect their own well-being while focusing on their child's issues.

You might experience some or all of these issues. Remember, every journey is unique, and there's no one-size-fits-all solution. SMART Recovery meetings are here to support you with resources and tools as you navigate this challenging path.

Find a free support meeting [here](https://smartrecoveryaustralia.com.au/smart-recovery-meetings).
(smartrecoveryaustralia.com.au/smart-recovery-meetings)

Top Tips in Dealing with these Issues:

Emotional Distress

Understanding Emotional Distress:

Being able to identify and validate your emotions with the support of others who understand can be deeply therapeutic. This is a core aspect of SMART Recovery Meetings. Sessions within the 8-week Family & Friends Course and drop-in SMART Meetings address emotional distress through topics such as self-care, cognitive behavioural Therapy (CBT), and assertive communication.

SMART Tools for Addressing Emotional Distress:

When dealing with emotional distress, several SMART Recovery tools can be highly effective for parents. These tools can help you manage your emotions, practice self-care, and seek appropriate support. Explore these tools in the [SMART Recovery 4-Point Toolkit](https://smartrecoveryaustralia.com.au/4-point-toolkit).

(smartrecoveryaustralia.com.au/4-point-toolkit)

1. The ABCs

(Antecedent, Behaviour, Consequence)

Why it's useful: The ABC Model helps parents identify the triggers (Antecedents) of their emotional distress, the resulting Behaviour, and the Consequences of those behaviours. This tool is crucial for understanding and altering negative emotional patterns.

Example:

- **Antecedent:** Feeling overwhelmed after a confrontation with your child.
- **Behaviour:** Shouting or becoming overly emotional.
- **Consequence:** Increased stress and a strained relationship with your child.

Alternative Outcome Using the ABC Tool:

- **Antecedent:** Recognise the buildup of stress after a confrontation with your child.
- **Behaviour:** Take a break, practice deep breathing, or use mindfulness techniques.
- **Consequence:** Reduced stress and a calmer response to the situation, resulting in a better relationship with your child.

2. Disputing Irrational Beliefs (DIBs)

Why it's useful: DIBs help parents identify and challenge irrational thoughts contributing to their emotional distress. By replacing these with more rational beliefs, parents can reduce negative emotions.

Example:

- **Irrational Belief:** "I'm a failure as a parent because my child uses substances."
- **Disputation:**
 - **Evidence:** "Many good parents face similar challenges; it doesn't mean I'm a failure."
 - **Logical:** "Their choosing to engage in that behaviour doesn't define my overall success or failure as a parent."
 - **Pragmatic:** "Believing I'm a failure only makes things worse. I can focus on positive actions to support my child."

3. Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA)

Why it's useful: CBA allows parents to weigh the pros and cons of their current emotional responses and behaviours and consider the benefits of adopting healthier coping mechanisms or changing behaviours.

Example:

• Current Communication Style:

- **Pros:** Getting my point heard by shouting; getting my feelings out.
- **Cons:** My child avoids me; we don't have conversations; poor relationship with my child; other family members spend less time at home; I feel like a bad parent; I miss spending time with my child.

• Changing Communication Style:

- **Pros:** My child might engage in conversation; a nicer home environment; other family members would spend more time at home; I might be able to save our relationship and ultimately help them.
- **Cons:** I don't know how; it might be hard.
- **Note:** These challenges are fixable and strategies can be learned in SMART meetings with others who understand how hard this is.

Utilising these tools can help you better manage emotional distress and improve your overall well-being while supporting your child.



Communication Challenges

If you are experiencing communication challenges with your child, you are not alone. Many parents face similar struggles, especially when their child is dealing with alcohol or drug use, or other problematic behaviours. Generational gaps, differing perspectives, and varying levels of emotional expression can contribute to these challenges, often leading to misunderstandings, strained relationships, and heightened stress levels.

Why Addressing Communication Challenges is Crucial:

- **Healthier Interactions:** Improved communication fosters healthier interactions within the family.
- **Better Support Systems:** Effective communication helps create a stronger support system for your child.

Key Skills for Effective Communication:

1. Active Listening:

- **Benefits:** Helps bridge the understanding gap between parents and children.
- **Techniques:** Listen to your child's point of view, show that you are listening, and provide feedback without judgment.

2. Non-Confrontational Communication:

- **Benefits:** Reduces conflict and promotes empathy.
- **Techniques:** Express thoughts and feelings respectfully and constructively, while listening to your child's perspective without immediate reaction.

Creating a safe space for your child to express themselves encourages trust and openness, making it easier to address the challenges associated with substance misuse. SMART Recovery Meetings provide an opportunity to learn and practice these skills through role-playing scenarios in a supportive environment.

Role Play Examples

Taken from Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish. (2012). *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk*.

Example 1

Discussing Concerns About Vaping

Scenario: Discussing concerns about vaping with your child.

Step 1: Pay Full Attention

- **Parent:** Puts away phone, turns off TV, and makes eye contact with the teenager.
- **Parent:** "I want to understand your thoughts on vaping. Let's sit down and talk."

Step 2: Show That You're Listening

- **Parent:** Nods occasionally, uses facial expressions, and maintains an open body posture.
- **Parent:** "Uh-huh, I see," while the teenager is speaking.

Step 3: Provide Feedback

- **Parent:** "It sounds like you're feeling pressured to try vaping because many of your friends are doing it. Is that right?"

Step 4: Defer Judgment

- **Parent:** Avoids interrupting or criticising.
- **Parent:** "I understand this is a tough situation for you. Let's talk about it."



Step 5: Respond Appropriately

- **Parent:** “I appreciate you sharing your feelings. How about we discuss some ways to handle this pressure and explore why vaping isn’t a safe choice?”

Dialogue Example:

- **Teenager:** “A lot of my friends vape, and they keep telling me to try it. I don’t want to feel left out, but I’m not sure if I want to do it.”
- **Parent:** (Nods and maintains eye contact) “I hear that you’re feeling a lot of pressure from your friends to vape. Can you tell me more about what they’re saying and how it makes you feel?”
- **Teenager:** “They say it’s not a big deal and that everyone is doing it. It makes me feel like I’m missing out if I don’t try it.”
- **Parent:** “It sounds like you’re worried about missing out and feeling left out. Thank you for being honest with me. I know it’s hard to go against your friends, but your health and safety are really important to me. Let’s talk about some strategies for handling this pressure and think about the risks involved with vaping. How does that sound?”

Example 2

Parent-Child Conversation about Substance Use

Scenario: A teenager, Alex, has been suspected of using substances, and their parent, Jamie, wants to have an open conversation about it.

- **Jamie (Parent):** Alex, I’ve noticed some changes in your behaviour recently, and I’m worried. Can we talk about what’s been going on?
- **Alex (Child):** I guess so. What do you want to know?
- **Jamie:** I’ve heard that you might be experimenting with substances. Is that true?
- **Alex:** Yeah, I’ve tried a few things. I don’t see the big deal.
- **Jamie:** I appreciate you being honest with me. Can you tell me more about why you decided to try them?
- **Alex:** I don’t know, everyone at school is doing it. It helps me fit in and feel less stressed.
- **Jamie:** It sounds like you’re feeling a lot of pressure to fit in and manage your stress. That must be tough. Can you tell me more about what you’re going through?
- **Alex:** Yeah, school is really stressful. There’s so much homework, and I feel like I can’t keep up. Plus, if I say no to my friends, they’ll think I’m weird or weak.

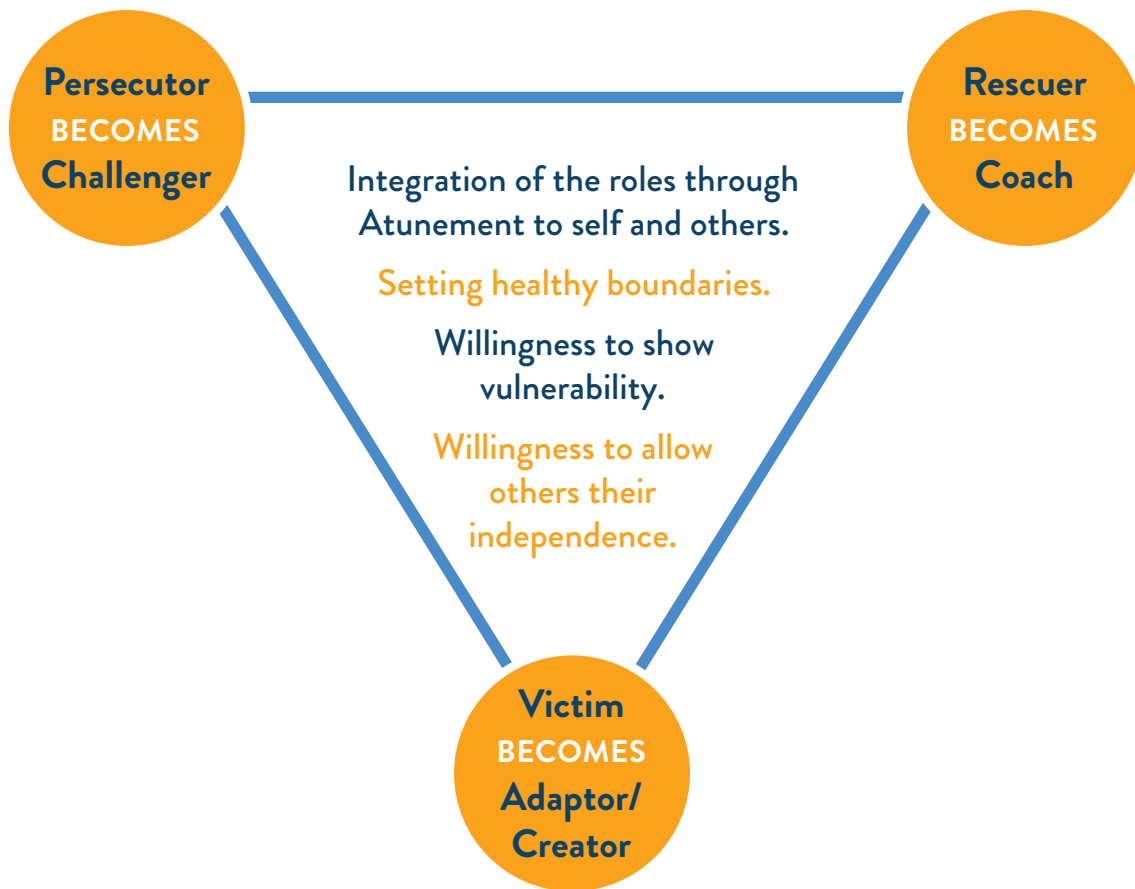
- **Jamie:** It sounds like you’re dealing with a lot of pressure from both school and your friends. I can understand why you might feel overwhelmed. How do you feel after using substances? Does it help with the stress?
- **Alex:** At first, it helps me relax, but then I feel worse later. I know it’s not good for me, but I don’t know what else to do.
- **Jamie:** I’m really glad you’re sharing this with me, Alex. It’s important for me to understand how you’re feeling. Let’s work together to find healthier ways to cope with your stress. How would you feel about talking to a counselor or finding some stress-relief activities you enjoy?
- **Alex:** I guess that might help. I just don’t want to feel so alone with all this.
- **Jamie:** You’re not alone, Alex. I’m here for you, and we can find solutions together. Let’s explore some options and see what works best for you.
- **Alex:** Okay, thanks, Mom/Dad.
- **Jamie:** Thank you for opening up to me. We’ll get through this together.

Demonstrated:

- **Active Listening:** Jamie shows active listening by concentrating on Alex’s words, acknowledging their feelings, and responding thoughtfully without interrupting.
- **Empathy:** Jamie expresses understanding and empathy for Alex’s situation, validating their feelings.
- **Non-Confrontational Communication:** Jamie avoids judgment and confrontation, creating a safe space for Alex to share openly.
- **Constructive Solutions:** Jamie works with Alex to find healthier coping mechanisms, showing support and willingness to help.

By practicing active listening and non-confrontational communication, parents can better understand their children’s perspectives, build stronger relationships, and effectively address sensitive issues like substance misuse.

Be Aware of the Drama Triangle



Adapted by Dr. Steven Karpman

The Karpman Drama Triangle is a model that illustrates conflicted and drama-intense relationship transactions, highlighting the roles people play and their connection to personal responsibility and power in conflicts.

The model identifies three key roles:

1. Victim:

- Feels helpless and oppressed, believing they cannot effect change.
- Avoids real change by convincing themselves and others that efforts are futile.
- Often seeks out Persecutors and Rescuers to reinforce their feelings of powerlessness.

2. Rescuer:

- Driven by the desire to help, often feels guilty if they do not intervene.
- Keeps the Victim dependent and avoids addressing their own problems.
- Attempts to help usually fail to create change, leading to frustration and potentially adopting the Persecutor role.

3. Persecutor:

- Blames and controls others, insisting the problems are their fault.
- Is critical and authoritarian but can become defensive and switch to the Victim role if attacked by others.

These roles are fluid, with individuals often shifting between them during conflicts, perpetuating the cycle of drama and dysfunction.

How the Drama Triangle Can Help Parents

- 1. Recognising Patterns:** Understanding the Drama Triangle can help parents recognise if they are slipping into one of the roles, which can perpetuate the addiction cycle. For example, if a parent consistently plays the Rescuer, they might inadvertently enable their teen's addiction by shielding them from the consequences of their actions.
- 2. Promoting Empowerment:** Instead of rescuing, parents can focus on empowering their teen to take responsibility for their recovery. This means providing support and resources without taking over the problem-solving process. Encouraging autonomy helps the teen build confidence and resilience.
- 3. Encouraging Accountability:** By avoiding the Persecutor role, parents can foster a supportive and non-judgmental environment. This approach encourages teens to be accountable for their actions without feeling attacked, which can be more conducive to positive change.
- 4. Fostering Healthy Communication:** The model encourages open and honest communication. Parents can use the insights from the Drama Triangle to facilitate discussions that focus on feelings, needs, and solutions rather than blame and rescue.

Practical Steps for Parents

- 1. Self-Reflection:**
 - Regularly reflect on interactions with your teen to identify if you are falling into the roles of Victim, Persecutor, or Rescuer.
 - Journaling or discussing with a therapist can help in this process.

2. Setting Boundaries:

- Establish clear, consistent boundaries to avoid enabling behaviours.
- Include consequences for breaking rules related to addiction.

3. Encouraging Responsibility:

- Help teens identify and utilise resources such as therapy, support groups, and healthy coping mechanisms.
- Encourage them to set their own goals for recovery and to take steps towards achieving them.

4. Seeking Support:

- Seek support for yourself, whether through therapy, support groups for families of addicts, or educational resources.
- Understanding your own needs and stresses can prevent you from slipping into unhelpful roles.

5. Promoting Open Dialogue:

- Create a safe space for your teen to express their feelings and struggles.
- Use active listening techniques and validate their experiences without trying to immediately fix their problems.

Conclusion

The Drama Triangle can be a powerful tool for parents supporting teenagers with addiction. By recognising and avoiding the roles of Victim, Persecutor, and Rescuer, parents can foster a more supportive, empowering, and constructive relationship with their teens. This approach not only supports the teen's recovery journey but also promotes healthier family dynamics.



SMART Recovery Tools for Addressing Communication Challenges

Several SMART Recovery tools can be particularly effective for parents facing communication challenges. These tools can help improve active listening skills, foster non-confrontational communication techniques, and create a safe space for youth to express themselves.

1. Change Plan Worksheet

Why it's useful: The Change Plan Worksheet helps parents set clear, actionable goals for improving communication and outlines the steps needed to achieve them.

Example:

Goal: Improve communication with my teenage daughter.
Steps to Achieve Goal:

1. Practice active listening techniques daily.
2. Avoid interrupting when she speaks.
3. Validate her feelings and experiences without judgment.
4. Attend weekly SMART Recovery meetings to maintain and practice new behaviour.

2. SMART Goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound)

Why it's useful: SMART Goals provide a structured way to set specific communication objectives, making it easier to track progress and adjust as needed.

Example:

Goal: Improve communication with my teenage daughter.
Making it SMART:

- **Specific:** Have a 15-minute conversation with my daughter every evening.
- **Measurable:** Use a communication log to track the duration and quality of these conversations.
- **Achievable:** Start with shorter conversations and gradually increase the time as comfort levels improve.
- **Relevant:** Improved communication will enhance our relationship and support her recovery.
- **Time-bound:** Aim to establish this routine over the next four weeks.

3. ABCs (Antecedent, Behaviour, Consequence)

Why it's useful: The ABCs help parents identify triggers (Antecedents) for poor communication behaviours, understand the resulting Behaviour, and assess the Consequences. This insight can help parents make more effective communication choices.

Example:

Antecedent: Feeling frustrated after a long day.

Behaviour: Snapping at my daughter when she tries to talk to me.

Consequence: Daughter shuts down and avoids future conversations.

Using the ABC Tool, a different outcome could be:

Antecedent: Recognise feelings of frustration early.

Behaviour: Take a few deep breaths before responding.

Consequence: A positive and productive conversation.

4. Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA)

Why it's useful: CBA helps parents and children weigh the pros and cons of current communication patterns and the potential benefits of adopting new strategies.

Example:

Current Communication Pattern: Interrupting and criticising.

Costs: Increased tension, decreased trust, and poor relationships.

Benefits: None significant.

Improved Communication Pattern: Active listening and validating feelings.

Costs: Requires effort and patience.

Benefits: Stronger relationships, increased trust, and better support for recovery.

These SMART Recovery tools can be instrumental in helping parents navigate communication challenges with their children, fostering healthier and more effective interactions that support both the child's recovery and the overall family dynamic.

Boundary Setting

Setting clear and consistent boundaries is crucial for maintaining a healthy family dynamic, especially when dealing with substance use issues. This can be incredibly challenging for parents of youth struggling with drugs, alcohol, or other behavioural concerns for a variety of complex reasons. SMART Recovery Meetings provide a supportive environment where you can navigate your concerns and challenges with others who understand how difficult this is. There is no right or wrong way; it's about finding what works best for you and your family. SMART Recovery offers several tools that can aid parents in this process.

SMART Recovery Tools for Boundary Setting

1. Hierarchy of Values

Why it's useful: The Hierarchy of Values helps parents and children identify and prioritise their core values. Understanding these values can guide the establishment of boundaries that reflect what is most important to the family.

Example:

Step 1: List core values such as trust, safety, respect, and honesty.

Step 2: Discuss how each value translates into specific boundaries (e.g., respect means no shouting or name-calling).

Step 3: Prioritise these values to help determine the most critical boundaries.

2. Change Plan Worksheet

Why it's useful: The Change Plan Worksheet helps parents outline specific goals for boundary setting, the steps required to achieve them, and the potential obstacles and solutions.

Example:

Goal: Establish a curfew for the teenager.

Steps:

1. Discuss the importance of a curfew with the child.
2. Agree on a specific time and days of the week.
3. Write down the agreed curfew and the consequences for not adhering to it.

Obstacles: Teens may resist the curfew.

Solutions: Explain the reasons behind the curfew, and listen to the teen's concerns.

3. Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA)

Why it's useful: CBA allows parents and youth to weigh the pros and cons of setting and maintaining specific boundaries. This can help them reach a mutual agreement and understand why boundaries are necessary.

Example:

Current behaviour: No boundaries regarding substance use in the home.

Pros:

- Think I can keep my child safe - I'm there if something happens.
- My child still spends time at home.

Cons:

- I no longer invite anyone around to the home.
- Impacts other members of my family.
- Arguing with husband.
- Worried that my younger children might think it's okay.
- I'm so angry at my child when I see them under the influence.
- They're not stopping.

New behaviour: Introducing boundaries.

Pros:

- I'm back in control of my home.
- I'm not condoning my child's behaviour.
- I can invite friends around and not worry.
- No more impact on other family members.
- Setting example for younger children.
- Feel like I'm doing something.

Cons:

- My child won't be at home as much.
- I'll worry more about where they are / what they're doing.
- Child might hate me.

4. SMART Goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound)

Why it's useful: SMART Goals provide a structured approach to setting and achieving boundary-related objectives. This helps ensure clarity and accountability.

Example:

Goal: Setting a curfew.

- **Specific:** Set a curfew of 10 PM on weekdays.
- **Measurable:** Track adherence to the curfew daily.
- **Achievable:** Ensure the curfew is reasonable and agreed upon by all parties.
- **Relevant:** Relates to the family's value of safety and responsibility.
- **Time-bound:** Review the curfew policy in one month to assess its effectiveness.



Creating a Family Agreement on Late-Night Outings

Establishing clear boundaries and consequences is crucial for parents navigating the challenges of raising children, especially in today's complex world. These boundaries provide structure and guidance, helping children understand expectations and consequences for their actions. Consistency in enforcing these boundaries is essential for fostering a secure and predictable environment, promoting healthy development and emotional well-being in children.

Addressing issues like late-night outings requires thoughtful consideration and proactive planning. Implementing a family agreement can be a practical tool to clarify expectations and reinforce the importance of responsible behaviour. By establishing and maintaining these boundaries, parents not only help their children develop crucial life skills but also cultivate a harmonious family environment based on respect and accountability.

Steps to Creating a Family Agreement on Late-Night Outings:

Family Discussion:

- **Start the Conversation:** Sit down together when everyone is free to chat.
- **Why We're Talking:** Discuss nighttime plans and how to stay on the same page.
- **What We Want:** Ensure everyone feels safe and knows what's expected when out late.

Writing It Down:

- **What We'll Decide:** Write down agreed points like when it's okay to be out late and how to keep in touch.
- **Getting Specific:** Be clear about what "late" means and how often to check in.

Agreeing Together:

- **Everyone's Say:** Ensure all family members discuss what's fair and important.
- **Making It Official:** Once agreed upon, everyone signs to show commitment.

Keeping Track:

- **How We'll Do It:** Display the agreement somewhere visible like the fridge or bulletin board.
- **Checking In:** Regularly discuss how well it's working and make any necessary changes.

Celebrating Good Moves:

When It Works Well: Acknowledge and celebrate adhering to the agreement.

This approach aims to create a friendly and collaborative atmosphere while still setting clear expectations and boundaries regarding late-night activities.



Understanding Alcohol and Other Drugs

Experimenting with drugs and alcohol during adolescence is unfortunately not uncommon and can have significant consequences. Adolescence is a period of exploration, curiosity, and peer influence, which can lead some individuals to try substances to fit in, rebel, cope with stress, or simply out of curiosity. However, it is essential to recognise the potential risks and consequences associated with drug and alcohol use during this critical

developmental stage. By understanding the underlying reasons behind experimentation, parents can approach conversations with empathy, openness, and guidance, aiming to steer their children towards healthier choices and responsible decision-making. Creating a supportive environment where open dialogue is encouraged can help adolescents navigate this challenging period with awareness and resilience.

Reasons and Causes of Alcohol and Drug Use in Adolescents

Reason	Supported Causes
Immediate gratification	Alcohol and drugs can produce pleasurable effects, providing a temporary escape from reality or simply making them feel good in the moment.
Socialisation	In many social settings, especially among peers, drinking alcohol or trying drugs is seen to have fun and bond with others. It's often perceived as a part of socialising.
Curiosity and exploration	Adolescence is a time of exploration and boundary testing. Curiosity about the effects of substances, coupled with a desire to experience new things, can lead some young people to experiment with alcohol or drugs.
Peer pressure	There might be pressure from friends or social groups to engage in substance use as a way of fitting in or gaining acceptance. Teens see others consuming substances and view it as a normal part of the teenage experience.
Boosting confidence	Some individuals may use alcohol or drugs to feel more confident or outgoing in social situations, particularly if they struggle with shyness or social anxiety.
Coping mechanism	Adolescence can be a turbulent time marked by various stressors, including academic pressure, family issues, or personal insecurities. Some young people turn to alcohol or drugs to cope with these challenges and temporarily alleviate complex thoughts or feelings.
Escape and Self-Medication	Teens may turn to substances to escape unhappiness, relieve frustrations, or self-medicate for depression, anxiety or stress.
Misinformation and Media Influence	Inaccurate information from peers about minimal risks contributes to teen substance use. Seeing substance use portrayed positively in media without consequences appeals to teens.
Rebellion and Risk-Taking	Substance use can be a form of rebellion to assert independence. Adolescence is a period of increased risk-taking behaviour, which may have had evolutionary survival value. The developing teenage brain is more prone to impulsive behaviour and less able to control impulses, contributing to risk-taking.

The Risks of Alcohol and Illicit Drugs for Youth and Adolescents

The risks associated with alcohol and drug use among youth and adolescents are significant and multifaceted, affecting physical health, mental health, neural development, and social functioning.

Physical Health Risks

1. Increased risk of injuries, accidents, and even death from overdose or impaired judgment while intoxicated.
2. Potential for developing physical disabilities, diseases, and cognitive impairments from substance abuse.
3. Heightened vulnerability to contracting HIV/AIDS or other sexually transmitted infections due to risky behaviours under the influence.

Mental Health Effects

1. **Depression and Anxiety:** Both alcohol and illicit drugs can exacerbate symptoms of depression and anxiety or even trigger these conditions in susceptible individuals.
2. **Psychosis:** Certain drugs, particularly hallucinogens like LSD or synthetic cannabinoids, can induce psychosis or exacerbate existing psychotic disorders.
3. **Suicide Risk:** Substance abuse is strongly linked to an increased risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviours among young people.
4. **Impaired Cognitive Functioning:** Chronic use of alcohol and drugs during adolescence can lead to long-term cognitive deficits, including impaired memory, attention, and decision-making skills.
5. Potential for developing substance use disorders that persist into adulthood.

Neural Effects

1. **Brain Development:** The adolescent brain is still developing, particularly regions responsible for decision-making, impulse control, and emotion regulation. Alcohol and drug use during this critical period can disrupt this development, leading to long-term consequences.
2. **Structural Changes:** Some drugs, such as methamphetamine and MDMA (Ecstasy), can cause structural changes in the brain, affecting areas related to memory, learning, and emotional processing.
3. **Neurotransmitter Imbalance:** Alcohol and drugs often act on neurotransmitter systems in the brain, altering their normal functioning. For example, alcohol affects gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) and glutamate, leading to changes in mood and cognition.
4. **Neurotoxicity:** Certain drugs, such as methamphetamine and cocaine, are neurotoxic and can damage neurons, leading to cognitive impairment and other neurological deficits.

Risk of Addiction

Early initiation of alcohol and drug use increases the risk of developing addiction later in life. The adolescent brain is particularly susceptible to the reinforcing effects of addictive substances, leading to a higher likelihood of dependence. Addiction can have profound impacts on mental health, relationships, academic and occupational functioning, and overall well-being.

A young man with dark curly hair, shirtless and wearing black shorts, is climbing a large, weathered tree trunk. He is barefoot and looking down. Below him, on a wooden platform, another person is visible, and a young man stands with his hands clasped. The background is a dense forest of green trees.

Social and Environmental Consequences

- 1. Academic Difficulties:** Alcohol and drug use during adolescence can lead to academic failure, absenteeism, poor grades, and higher dropout rates.
- 2. Strained Relationships:** Substance use can strain relationships with family and peers, leading to social alienation.
- 3. Delinquent behaviour:** Increased likelihood of delinquent behaviour, crime, and involvement with the juvenile justice system.

Long-Term Consequences

- 1. Impaired Psychosocial Development:** Difficulty achieving life goals.
- 2. Long-term Health Issues:** Potential for long-term health issues, cognitive deficits, and reduced productivity.
- 3. Family and Community Impact:** The financial and emotional strain on families and communities.

Self-Care for Parents

Taking care of one's own mental and physical health is crucial for parents supporting youth struggling with behaviours of concern. Creating a structured self-care plan helps parents prioritise their well-being, essential for maintaining the energy and resilience needed to support their family. The connection between self-care and mental health is profound, especially while supporting loved ones through problematic behaviours.

Benefits of Self-Care for Mental Health

- 1. Stress Reduction:** Activities such as deep breathing, meditation, or exercise can help reduce stress levels.
- 2. Emotional Regulation:** Tools like mindfulness, journaling, or spending time in nature help manage emotions.
- 3. Prevention of Burnout:** Regular self-care practices, including taking breaks and setting boundaries, prevent burnout.
- 4. Building Resilience:** Strengthen capacity to cope with life's challenges.
- 5. Improved Self-Esteem:** Engaging in enjoyable activities can boost self-esteem.
- 6. Enhanced Coping Mechanisms:** Effective coping strategies contribute to better mental health outcomes.

- 7. Promoting Boundaries:** Establishing healthy boundaries in relationships, work, and personal life.
- 8. Encouraging Self-Reflection:** Activities like journaling or practicing mindfulness promote self-awareness.
- 9. Encouraging Help-Seeking behaviour:** Fosters a mindset that values mental health, making individuals more open to seeking professional help.
- 10. Positive Impact on Relationships:** Emotional well-being positively influences interactions with others.

SMART Recovery Tools for Self-Care

1. The Importance of Self-Care Exercise
2. Lifestyle Balance Activities Checklist
3. Enjoyable Activities Checklist
4. SAFE Plan and Contacts

By implementing these self-care practices, parents can better support their own mental and physical health, which in turn enhances their ability to effectively support their children through challenging behaviours and substance use issues.



Support and Resources for Parents and Carers

Here is a list of Australian support services and resources available for parents and carers seeking help with adolescent substance use and related challenges:

National and State-Based Organisations

Australian Drug Foundation (ADF)

www.adf.org.au

Provides information on drug prevention, resources for families, and local support services.

Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS)

www.aifs.gov.au

Offers research and resources on family dynamics, including issues related to substance use.

National Alcohol and Other Drug Knowledge Centre

aodknowledgecentre.ecu.edu.au

Provides resources and information about alcohol and drug issues, including family support.

ReachOut Australia

au.reachout.com

Offers information and resources for parents and young people dealing with mental health and substance use issues.

The National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC)

www.unsw.edu.au/research/ndarc

Provides research and resources on drug and alcohol use and its impact on families.

State-Based Support Services

Victorian Government - Better Health Channel

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Offers information on drug and alcohol use, including resources for families.

NSW Health - Drug and Alcohol Services

www.health.nsw.gov.au/aod

Provides information on local drug and alcohol services and support for families.

Queensland Health - Alcohol and Drug Support

www.qld.gov.au/health/staying-healthy/alcohol-and-other-drugs/how-to-get-help

Resources and support for dealing with substance use issues in Queensland.

WA Health - Drug and Alcohol Office

www.mhc.wa.gov.au/about-us/our-services/alcohol-and-drug-support-service/

Information and resources for drug and alcohol services in Western Australia.

South Australian Health - Drug and Alcohol Services

www.sahealth.sa.gov.au

Provides support and resources for dealing with substance use in South Australia.

Online Resources and Forums

The Link Foundation

linkfoundationaod.org.au

Phone: +61 2 9319 2399

Email: contact@linkfoundationaod.org.au

Address: 6/2-4 Rue de Montreuil, Redfern, NSW 2016, Australia

Family Drug Support

www.fds.org.au/

Offers online support groups, resources, and information for families affected by drug and alcohol issues.

Alcohol and Drug Foundation (ADF) - Online Support

adf.org.au/help-support/

Provides access to support services and online resources.

Parenting Ideas

parentingideas.com.au

Offers advice and resources for parents, including strategies for managing substance use issues.

Professional Help

Headspace

headspace.org.au

Provides mental health support for young people, including issues related to substance use.

Kids Helpline

kidshelpline.com.au

Offers 24/7 counseling for children and young people, as well as resources for parents.

Lifeline Australia

www.lifeline.org.au

Provides crisis support and suicide prevention services, including support for families.

Beyond Blue

www.beyondblue.org.au

Offers support for mental health issues, including resources for families dealing with substance use.

Educational Materials

Books and Guides

“The Parents’ Guide to Teen Addiction: A Roadmap for Families” by Dr. Richard Juman

“Adolescent Substance Use: An Overview for Parents” by Dr. Joan Rosenbaum Asarnow

“How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk.” Adele Faber and Elaine Maslish. (2012). London: Piccadilly Press.

“The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families.” Stephen R. Covey. (1997). New York: St. Martin’s Press.

“The Karpman Drama Triangle.” Karpman, S. (1968). Transactional Analysis Bulletin, 7(26), 39-43.

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