

They have cognitive components that interfere with people's thought processes and perceptions of themselves, the world, and those around them. They have an emotional dimension that creates unpleasant and uncomfortable feelings.

Recovery and Relapse Prevention

Recovery and relapse prevention for someone with co-occurring disorders is multifaceted. It is important to develop a comprehensive recovery plan that addresses abstinence from mood-altering substances as well as the need for therapy and medication. The most effective treatment involves a combination of self-help, medication, and talk therapy.

Other essential elements of a recovery program and relapse prevention plan include

- developing a network of supportive, healthy, clean-and-sober peers
- creating a healthy and fun lifestyle
- finding and regularly attending a Twelve Step group
- working with a psychiatrist or physician who understands co-occurring disorders and can manage medication
- working with a therapist with knowledge of co-occurring disorders
- developing relationships with your sponsor, doctor, and therapist that are based on honesty

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Adolescents and Co-occurring Disorders

F A C I L I T A T O R ' S G U I D E

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Note:

Before showing the video, take a few minutes to review this guide, which provides some general information about co-occurring disorders and young people. Feel free to copy and distribute the reproducible worksheet to clients to help them better process the video content. The worksheet questions can be used to generate group discussion.

Introduction

During this video, five courageous young people share their stories of addiction, psychiatric illness, and recovery. By listening to these sincere and real-life stories, the viewers will be able to recognize and understand their co-occurring disorders and develop a clear picture of what steps are necessary to initiate and maintain a recovery program. Most important, this video was created to provide a sense of hope and inspiration with the message that recovery is possible and that a better, more rewarding life is accessible.

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What Is Meant by Co-occurring Disorder?

The term *co-occurring disorder* is used to describe a substance-abuse problem that co-exists with another psychiatric diagnosis. There are many psychiatric disorders that commonly occur in substance-abusing young people. The most common are disorders that seriously affect mood, such as depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder. In addition, a large percentage of young people with substance-abuse problems have a diagnosis of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

In order to start a recovery program, it is important that adolescents understand

- the symptoms of their psychiatric disorder
- the connection between this disorder and their motivation to use mood-altering substances
- the interaction between mood-altering substances and psychiatric symptoms
- the role of medication in recovery
- the interaction between mood-altering substances and psychiatric medications
- the process of recovery from a co-occurring disorder

Important Considerations

When a co-occurring disorder is present, it's necessary to consider the following elements during the assessment and treatment process:

- Significant problems can result when a young person with a psychiatric condition uses even a small amount of a mood-altering substance, because the symptoms of the psychiatric condition become more severe. Therefore, people do not have to have extensive substance-use histories for this use to create significant life problems and serious

consequences. For example, someone who has severe mood swings as a result of bipolar disorder and uses powerful stimulants such as cocaine or Ecstasy will suffer severe mood problems even if the use is minimal.

- The use of mood-altering substances interferes with the effectiveness of medication used to treat psychiatric disorders. For example, someone who is regularly smoking marijuana and takes stimulant medication for treatment of ADHD will not benefit from the stimulants because the use of marijuana will create cognitive impairment that mimics ADHD symptoms.
- It is irrelevant which came first: the psychiatric diagnosis or the substance abuse. If both currently exist, both must be treated at the same time. The psychiatric issue will not improve as long as the use of mood-altering substances persists. In a similar way, discontinuing the use of mood-altering substances does not necessarily guarantee that the psychiatric symptoms will disappear.
- People with psychiatric disorders use mood-altering substances in an attempt to manage their moods. Unfortunately, the use of mood-altering substances only makes the psychiatric disorders worse.

Understanding Psychiatric Disorders

It is important to provide young people with simple, concise, and easy-to-understand definitions of psychiatric disorders.

Psychiatric disorders share common elements. They have a physical base and stem from dysfunction of brain chemicals. They affect most if not all areas of people's lives, such as school, friendships, and family relationships.

Adolescents and Co-occurring Disorders Worksheet

What is meant by the term *co-occurring disorder*?

What type of support network does someone need to start recovery and avoid relapse?

What happens when someone is not honest with a therapist or psychiatrist?

Why are mood-altering substances so dangerous for people with problems such as depression, anxiety, or attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder?

What was the most helpful thing you learned from watching this video and listening to the stories of the young people?
