

## Learning To Live With Mental Illness After Problematic Drug Use

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Mental illness comes in many forms, but a lot of them have similar effects on mood, behavior, and emotions. It can be difficult to cope with these effects--particularly if the disorder hasn't been properly diagnosed, which unfortunately is the case for many people--and individuals often turn to drugs or alcohol to help themselves deal with daily life. These substances can sometimes make things worse and can have a negative effect on sleep, eating habits, mood, behavior, and emotional health. They can exacerbate the issues a mental illness has already caused and can even [mask that illness](#), making it harder for a doctor to diagnose.

It's never easy to decide to ask for help; you may feel a disconnect from friends and family, especially if you have been abusing drugs or alcohol for a long time, or you may not want to talk about the reasons you began using substances due to their private nature. However, it's extremely important to be open and honest about your activities, your concerns, and why drugs or alcohol provide relief when reaching out to a therapist or physician so that they can have all the facts before giving a diagnosis.

Once you've done that, it's time to take the rocky path towards recovery by finding a treatment facility that best suits your needs. Examples of individual treatment centers include [Swift River](#), [Awakenings By The Sea](#), and [Greenhouse](#). The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) also offers a searchable [nationwide directory](#). It is not an easy thing to go through alone, so securing some sort of support system is necessary for most people. After that, healing and treatment can begin. Here are a few ways you can help things along.

## **Seek support**

Mental illness and substance abuse disorder can change relationships drastically, so if you feel you don't have a strong support system within your circle of friends or your family, consider looking for a support group nearby or online. Group therapy can sometimes be helpful as well, as you'll be able to seek treatment with others who know what you're going through.

## **Focus on you**

It's difficult to sort out the symptoms of drug abuse from those associated with mental illness, and it may take a while for your physician or counselor to help you come to a diagnosis and treatment plan that you're both comfortable with. For this reason, it's very important that you focus on getting better and engage in healthy ways to make yourself feel good. This can include cooking a favorite meal, treating yourself to a massage, spending the day with a friend shopping or relaxing, or luxuriating in a long, hot bath.

## **Find help from other sources**

Service animals are wonderful companions for those living with a mental health disorder. They can provide comfort for individuals suffering from anxiety, PTSD, and a number of emotional disorders and can have a calming effect for their owners. Studies have shown that petting a dog can actually lower a person's blood pressure, making service animals the perfect choice for individuals who are having a hard time following problematic drug abuse.

## **Take care**

Remember that recovery includes getting your physical, spiritual, and mental health back on track. Taking care of your body by eating well and getting in daily exercise is just as important as nurturing your emotional and mental health, so don't forget to eat a balanced diet and get enough sleep. Taking care of yourself can help you see your own value and can boost self-esteem, as well.

*As a pre-med student, Jennifer McGregor knows how difficult it can be to sift through health info on the web, and wants to change that so she co-created the Public Health Library. She loves providing reliable health and medical resources and considers this as her passion.*