

Insights from the ADDICTION BATTLEGROUND

OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS I have watched my lifelong friend, Michelle, as she coped with her young adult daughter's involvement with drugs and subsequent addiction. She shared some insights with me that might be helpful for those affected by AD/HD when seeking treatment.

1 When researching treatment programs, especially online, beware of unscrupulous programs. Some advertised programs are legitimate; others have a hidden agenda. You will want a program that has treated individuals with AD/HD. For resources, ask your physician, your local mental health association, or call your health insurance member hotline.

2 Be careful about under-reacting or over-reacting to a loved one's drug use. "I wish I had taken more thoughtful action when I found marijuana in my daughter's room," says Michelle. "I took it away from her, grounded her, made her earn back her privileges, and watched her like a hawk after that episode. In retrospect, I should have taken her for a drug and alcohol evaluation." Drug and alcohol specialists know the questions to ask to determine whether someone is experimenting or using drugs occasionally as opposed to having an addiction.

Michelle adds, "The reality is that addiction is a chronic and potentially fatal illness. Death can occur from the drug itself or from the risky behaviors that accompany addiction. Taking action to get treatment is as imperative as for any serious physical illness."

3 Having serious conversations and trying to make decisions with someone with an untreated drug or alcohol problem can be tricky. Even when they aren't drunk or high, the substances have affected their brains, which means that their actions might not match their words.

4 Forget everything you have seen in the movies and on television. In Hollywood, when an individual seeks or accepts help for addiction, he or she is placed in the appropriate facility immediately. In reality, finding help can depend on health insurance, available space in a treatment facility, and other factors. Your family physician may be able to help in some instances.

5 Depending on the outcome of the drug and alcohol evaluation, some insurance policies recommend outpatient treatment programs—which means that when the program ends for the day, attendees have access to the same temptations they are trying to avoid. There are situations where outpatient programs may be appropriate as it enables participants to maintain employment and family responsibilities.

6 Treatment facilities are also different than what is shown on television. While some are elegant resort-like places, others can be rather shabby and crowded. The building's appearance might not have any bearing on the treatment provided. This is one of those "when the student is ready, the teacher appears" situations.

7 Keep an open mind. Some drug and alcohol specialists will be well dressed and polished. Others will not. My friend's daughter learned some of her best lessons in a crowded 1950s-era converted-house treatment facility from a counselor who had previously worked at Rikers Island.

8 Watch to whom you disclose your loved one's situation. There is still so much stigma surrounding mental health issues, addiction in particular, and you don't want to inadvertently diminish the person's chances for future opportunities.

9 If you have been coping with the chaos of someone else's drug problem, you might feel confused and emotionally depleted. Family and friends have unique needs and concerns, and treatment programs recognize this. Two organizations that have helped many people over the years are Al-Anon and Nar-Anon. Some rehab centers offer programs for family and friends, even for those who aren't clients at their facility. Also, some AA and NA meetings are open to all interested parties, not just those in recovery from alcoholism or addiction.

10 Whether you are seeking treatment for yourself or someone you love, my friend found the following quote helpful: "To go somewhere you've never gone, you have to do something you've never done." **A**

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