

## Presence of Mind: Understanding Addiction

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Visual: Presence of Mind: Understanding Addiction. Erin Ashley Simon, multimedia personality, host, producer, consultant, and part-owner of the new esports organization, XSET, shares why it's important to speak openly about addiction.

Erin Ashley Simon: Hi. I'm here to talk about a really important issue, addiction. If you think addiction is something that only happens to other people and that it can't happen to you or the people you care about, please think again. None of the many young people who are suffering now with an addiction, or those who died last year, thought it could happen to them. In this video, you'll learn that addiction is a treatable health condition. You'll hear more about who's most at risk and how dangerous drug and alcohol use is. When you're younger. Many people judge others who are who struggle with an addiction, thinking it's a personal failing. No, it's not their fault. They need our support, not our judgment. If you don't know how to start a difficult conversation, well, this video will give you ideas to help. As a community, we can remove unhealthy stigma about addiction by talking about it and by getting people the help they need. Watch the video and learn why we need to rethink what we know about addiction.

Visual: Questions answered in this video.

Narrator: This video focuses on helping you understand when alcohol or drug use is a problem. It will answer the following questions. What is an addiction? Why do some people develop an addiction and others do not? How do you know if someone's alcohol or drug use is a serious problem? What can you do to help someone else? What resources are available to people that need help? The harm caused by drugs and alcohol on young people is real. 2020 saw the highest overdose death rates among 15 to 24 year olds ever recorded. A 48% increase over 2019. Nearly three fourths of those deaths are due to opioid overdoses, an epidemic fueled by overuse and misuse of prescription and street drugs. Addiction has even been called an adolescent disease because many of those who develop a

substance use disorder begin use as adolescents. To change this devastating epidemic. We need to start with understanding how alcohol and drugs affect the brain. Our brain rewards us when we do things that feel good to us. Think about that great feeling you get when you win a game, exercise, or are attracted to another person. These positive behaviors release chemicals in our brain that make us feel good and encourage us to repeat the behavior. Alcohol and drugs hijack that same part of the brain. In some people, this happens in an extreme way, encouraging them to keep drinking or taking drugs even when those behaviors become a serious problem. With an addicted brain, it becomes difficult to control the urge to use. People with addiction often describe their initial use as a fun experience. Over time, they need to use more and more to feel good. When they stop using, they feel depressed, anxious, or just bad. The brains tell them to use again and again, creating a vicious cycle. This negative cycle can damage the person's health and future. Why do some people develop an addiction? Let's listen to Paydn talk about his early experiences with another highly addictive substance, nicotine, and some of the risk factors for addiction he possessed.

Visual: Paydn's story

Paydn: I had my first cigarette when I was 12 years old and me and my friends, we just loved the appeal of smoking cigarettes - the whole Hollywood thing with cool guys having a cigarette hanging out of their mouths - that was really right up my alley when I was younger. And, of course I wanted to ignore absolutely everything that people older than me had to say about the right way to live and I just knew at a young age that I had the way to live. So I started at, middle school age. I always kind of knew that I wanted to smoke. I had an aunt who was a really big influence on me, and I looked up to her a lot. She smoked so you could say I was sort of raised to be a smoker as well. My parents warned me all the time before I started that, both of them came from families that suffered from addiction. So, genetically, I was just, like, the perfect target for nicotine to take a hold of, and, Yeah. Growing up and dealing with that for a very long time had its share of consequences. I think the most prolific of all of those was, decades long struggle with depression that, I only recently got over. It was long after I quit smoking that I was able to really turn my life around. And, take it by the reins and live it as it's supposed to be lived, in my opinion, which is healthy and and with with the love of life. I, stopped

smoking cold turkey when I was 26. Four years ago now. And I just really wish I could help other people quit as easily as I did.

Narrator: Like other diseases and ailments, substance use impacts everyone differently. Scientists refer to several risk factors that increase the likelihood of substance use becoming an addiction. These include age of first use, genetics and environment. The first risk is the age that a person first tries drugs or alcohol. Our brains continue to develop until around age 25. Teens who start drinking by age 14 are seven times more likely to develop addiction to alcohol than those who start drinking at age 21 or older. 25% who begin misusing drugs at age 13 will develop a substance use disorder. Consider the healthy choice of delaying or avoiding early use of alcohol or drugs. If a problem does exist, addressing it early on can make a big difference in a young person's health and well-being. Genetics account for up to 60% of a person's risk with anxiety, depression, ADHD, or other mental health issues exist. The risk for experimenting with and developing an addiction to drugs or alcohol is greater. If someone has mental health issues or a family history with addiction, educate them about the risks and discuss with them how to reduce them. A person's environment can contribute to addiction risk if there is mental or physical abuse, limited family or community support, or parents that misuse substances. The risk increases. Peer pressure to use and bullying also create risk. Protection from environmental risks includes participating in positive online communities, wellness activities, and connection to positive role models in your family or community. One positive role model can make all the difference. How do you recognize if someone's use of a substance is harmful to them? Watch this short animation to learn 11 signs to look for to recognize a problem in yourself or someone else. Within the past 12 months:

Visual: #1

Narrator: Is a substance user using more than intended?

Visual: #2

Narrator: Trying but unable to cut down?

Visual: #3

Narrator: Focus on obtaining and using?

Visual: #4

Narrator: Experiencing cravings?

Visual: #5

Narrator: Unable to manage work, school, or home commitments?

Visual: #6

Narrator: Using despite causing relationship issues?

Visual: #7

Narrator: Giving up important school or work activities?

Visual: #8

Narrator: Using in dangerous situations?

Visual: #9

Narrator: Using despite negative health impacts?

Visual: #10

Narrator: Experiencing increasing tolerance?

Visual: #11

Narrator: Experiencing withdrawal symptoms?

Narrator: People with 2 or 3 symptoms are considered to have a mild substance use disorder 4 or 5 a moderate disorder, and 6 or more, severe substance use disorder, or what we commonly referred to as addiction. Remember, this assessment is not a replacement for a professional one. Maybe this video or something else is making you think twice about your substance use. Or maybe, you are thinking about another's substance use

and worrying about them. The first step is to realize that there may be a problem. A great next step is to talk to someone who is willing to listen without judgment and provide support. What can you start doing today for yourself? Talk to someone, a good friend, trusted adult parent, counselor, or addiction clinician. There are also anonymous resources that you can access. You'll hear about next. Treatment works. It works. As with other health conditions, addiction is treatable with addiction therapy support and sometimes medications. To begin, recognize the problem and start the conversation. What can I do to help someone else? Let's listen to Kala talk about how he tried to help friends who substance use was concerning.

Visual: Kala's story

Kala: So, I grew up with alcoholism and drug addiction ravaging my household in childhood. I would get so angry at my parents for being drunk 24/7, and I would scream at them to quit everything that they're doing. And while I think my feelings of abandonment and anger were justified in that situation, I now know that there's pretty much nothing that I can say that will make somebody quit drinking or using drugs. I've had countless phone calls from old friends that are completely incoherent because they're on a salad of drugs and alcohol, and it's really hard to deal with because you love them so much. And you see all the harm that they're doing to themselves, and you just want to help them. But I've learned over the years that the absolute best thing you can do in these situations is to just be patient and kind and loving and understanding without being patronizing or preachy. Be there for the person they're talking to you for a reason, right? They need you. They feel like they need you, but you also need to be able to set an emotional boundary. It's not your job to list the things that the person needs to do in order to fix themselves. And at the end of the day, they just need help, but they need to be the ones that come to that conclusion. Most of the time, people in addicted situations know that they need help. It's just they're not able to make that decision for themselves yet. And know that it's not your job to be in complete emotional stress 24/7 over somebody else's actions. You're free from that. It's not your responsibility. Their addiction isn't your fault, and it's not your job to fix them. Loving them and being there for them is the best thing that you can do. Only once they ask for help should you offer it. Everything else is in their hands.

Visual: How to engage with someone.

Narrator: Not sure how to engage with someone? Concerned you don't know the right thing to say? It can be hard to start the conversation. Here are some things to keep in mind. Use "I" statements. Avoid the word "you". "I'm worried" is far more effective than "you need help". Don't tell the person what to do. Focus the conversation. Keep your talk centered on how worried you are about them. Relaxing your body language will make them more comfortable. Be curious, ask questions. This shows that you're really trying to understand and not judge. Don't fill silences or you may miss important information. Leave the door open for future conversations. You don't need to solve the problem in this moment, provide opportunities for future discussion when someone is ready. Denial and ambivalence toward help is common. What you may be hearing is: "I don't have a problem." "I can handle it." "You're just imagining things." "It's not affecting my life." "All my friends are doing it and they're okay." What can you say in response? You can say: "I'm worried about you." "Is there anyone you feel comfortable talking to about this?" "I feel you're missing out on a lot of things." "I'm always here for you to talk." "I watched some videos recently and learned a lot, can I send them to you?" "Do you ever feel like the drugs and alcohol are taking all your time and energy?"

Visual: Wrapping it up. Addiction can happen to anyone. Thanks for taking the time to learn what to do to help yourself or someone else.

Erin Ashley Simon: Thank you so much for taking the time to watch this video. I'm really proud to be a part of this community and I really appreciate you wanting to learn more about addiction. We need to look out for each other and by doing so that means we have to keep openly talking about hard topics like addiction. The stigma around it is literally killing people who don't get help. Let's continue to have these conversations in our community and reach out to save lives. Use what you've learned in this video to help. Take care of yourself and those around you.

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