THE PARENT’S GUIDE TO
Putting Your Oxygen Mask on First
When Your Child is Struggling With Drugs or Alcohol

25 TIPS TO STAY CALM, CENTERED, AND PRESENT
WHEN YOUR CHILD’S STRUGGLE HAS TAKEN OVER YOUR LIFE

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome, I’m so glad you’re here!

Hi, I’m Cathy Taughinbaugh. Can I tell you why I’m passionate about helping concerned parents have a life line when things feel like they are falling apart around you?

I want to share tips and strategies that will help you take better care of yourself, so that you can move past the struggle with your child’s substance use to a more positive place.

I’m here to help so you can take control of your life again and live with less worry or stress and more compassion and optimism.

Would you like less confrontation, drama, and fear, and fewer late night calls from the police, traumatic situations, or sleepless nights?

This is for you if…

• You’ve just discovered that your teen is smoking marijuana, drinking, or using harder drugs.

• You feel sadness, shame, and fear because of your young adult’s drug or alcohol use.

• You are always waiting for the other shoe to drop and never know what to expect next.

• You’re exhausted with the lying, betrayal, and lack of trust and you miss the joy you had as a family.

• You want to continue to love and support your child, but you are not sure how to find the balance between helping/enabling.

• You feel anger and resentment because of your child’s situation. You want to be supportive, but at times it feels frustrating because you are dealing with the same thing over and over.

• You dread your phone ringing or getting a text message because you fear the worst.

• Your child is further along the path in early recovery, however you still find yourself worrying that your child will relapse.

If any of this sounds like you, I’m glad you are reading this guide today.
I want you to know that it is possible to live a life with less stress and anxiety and more happiness no matter what your child chooses to do.

As you become more aware of the problem and begin looking for answers, being aware of all the options available to you can make a difference in your child’s chances of changing their life for the better.

This guide will help you:

• Expand your knowledge of substance use disorder
• Discover that when you help yourself, you help your child
• Identify key ways in which you can communicate better with your child.
• Realize the value of having a deeper understanding of what your child is going through

Before we dive into The Parent’s Guide to Putting Your Oxygen Mask on First When Your Child is Struggling With Drugs or Alcohol, I want to tell you a bit about my background and why I’m so passionate about sharing this information with you.

A little bit about me: I’ve walked in your shoes and know first hand the pain that you may be feeling right now. I have discovered so much from my experiences and I continue to learn more everyday.

I have a California teaching credential, and while I was working with my fourth graders, I didn’t realize that drug use was happening in my home.

Through treatment centers, coaching, counseling, interventions, sober living homes, and support groups, my kids found their way back. As parents we did our work as well.

As time went on and our family recovered, the drug problem in our communities and our country continued to disturb me. As the years progressed, I knew I wanted to help spread the word about prevention and help parents in whatever way I could.

During my last year of teaching, I was recognized as our school district’s Technology Teacher of the Year, which was a fun ending to a rewarding career. I soon realized that I could put my two passions together, technology and being another voice around the dangers of substance use prevention. I decided to create my website, CathyTaughinbaugh.com, in 2010, and my work has been evolving ever since.
With my college major in psychology and sociology, coaching seemed a perfect fit. Through my training courses, I have become certified in parent, life, and recovery coaching,

The Partnership for Drug-Free Kids approached me to join their National Parent Network. Through the network, I met so many amazing parents across the country, which led me to train with the Center for Motivation and Change, I was introduced to the Community Reinforcement and Family Training or CRAFT approach. I have also trained with Robert J. Meyers, Ph.D., the founder of CRAFT.

This training has broadened my philosophy about how we can help our kids when they are struggling with substance use as well as the value of being positive and optimistic. I’m passionate about sharing the research-based CRAFT approach with other parents because it has made so much sense to me and the parents I’ve worked with.

My job as a parent coach is to help you to get back on track. We all need support and encouragement when our kids are struggling. My clients have commented that they feel lighter after talking with me and that the positive reinforcement and staying connected to their child, which is part of the CRAFT approach, “has been the BEST advice they’ve heard.” Many parents have expressed that they wish they had known about CRAFT sooner in the process.

CRAFT reminds us that we are not alone, and it emphasizes how stressful substance use can be, so that by taking care of yourself, you help your family. Rather than having one solution for all, it is important to realize that every situation is different.

CRAFT teaches parents communication strategies that help your child change. These skills help to reduce substance use whether your child receives formal treatment or not.

Finally, CRAFT shares ways in which parents can help their child that are not enabling.

Unfortunately some families think, “Not my kid!” and then come to find out that their teen’s experimentation with drugs or alcohol has lead them to a substance use disorder.

You may be feeling frustrated, angry, scared, and resentful because you’ve discovered that your child is using drugs. Most parents feel helpless and do not know what to do.

The first thing to remember is that you are not alone. Millions of families are struggling with substance use across America. While this is an unfortunate fact, it does provide opportunities to learn from others and to receive support.

The good news is that there are things that you can do as a parent to influence your child so that they change their life for the better. For example, ‘leaning in’ rather than letting go can
make a difference when it comes to helping your child make positive changes.

Remember, you can be happier once again despite substance use. Life can be better.

These tips can make a difference and get your family on the road to positive change.

To get the most out of these tips, read them and use the ones that resonate with you the most. Not all tips will apply to you, so follow your instincts here.

Here are 25 essential tips that can help you when your child is struggling:

1. **Take care of yourself first before you try and help your child.**

   Keep your brain and physical body as healthy as possible. Things like exercise, taking time for yourself, and enjoying friendships are all ways to help you feel better. Take a few moments each day to be still, meditate, or just breathe. It helps to take a break from your anxious thoughts. You will feel better, be able to make better decisions and model healthy behavior for your child when you take care of yourself.

2. **Educate yourself about drug and alcohol abuse.**

   Do your best to be realistic about the problem. If your child is a teen, don’t assume that their using is a passing phase. Sometimes it is; however this could also be the beginning of a long road of substance abuse. It is better to do what you can to help motivate your teen to make better choices. The sooner you can address the problem, the better.

3. **Reach out for help and support from others who understand.**

   Don’t isolate because of shame or embarrassment. Getting support from a trained, objective person can make a difference. Support groups can also be helpful. When you work with someone who has walked in your shoes, you benefit from their knowledge and experience. Personal support can help you make better decisions when you are feeling scared and frustrated. It takes courage, persistence, and determination to recognize your own pattern of behavior. Everything can change when you change the way you react to your child.
4. **Learn about the CRAFT approach.**

CRAFT is the leading research-supported way for families to help their substance-using loved ones. This approach helps you communicate in a more positive way so that you have a better chance of reducing your child’s substance use and/or getting your child into treatment. It is a program that many parents have found extremely powerful. Be sure to check out the Parent’s 20-Minute Guide as well as the HBO Addiction link on CRAFT.

5. **Let go of judgmental language.**

We often hear the words addict, alcoholic, enabler, or co-dependent. These are words that have been used for a long time. What has become clear is that these words continue the stigma and may prevent your child from seeking the treatment or lifestyle change that they need. It is better to let go of the negative labels as they are not usually helpful.

6. **Take the time to understand what your child is going through.**

It is easy to go into panic mode and focus only on getting your child to stop. Taking the time to first understand what is motivating your child to act out and use drugs or abuse alcohol can make a difference to your child’s future. It is helpful for you as parent to understand why your child is using as it encourages the two of you to work together on the problem.

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7. **Listen to your child.**

Kids are under a tremendous amount of pressure these days to experiment with drugs and alcohol. Powerful parenting includes accepting what your child is going through and having empathy for their situation. Express to your child that you may have felt the same way when you were young. This is not to say that you agree with their choices; however it can help with mutual understanding and support. Be a good listener when your child talks about the pressure they feel, and be supportive of their efforts to resist it.
8. **Talk to your child in a positive, calm manner.**

It doesn’t help your child if you yell, scream, confront, or threaten. They will listen to you and you will have a better chance that they will make better choices if you stay positive. Take your emotional distress down a notch and speak to them as often as possible in a calm and understanding manner. Having a conversation rather than a confrontation helps to maintain a strong relationship with your child.

“Having a conversation rather than a confrontation helps to maintain a strong relationship with your child.”

9. **Read books about substance abuse and recovery.**

There are numerous books on substance use. While some of our kids are at the experimental stages, others have gone on to depend on drugs or alcohol to get through their day. Three of my favorites are Beyond Addiction, Get Your Loved One Sober, and The Parent’s 20-Minute Guide. Three personal memoirs that are popular are Beautiful Boy, The Lost Years, and Stay Close. There are, of course, many more.

10. **Check out helpful websites.**

These sites will inform you about current teen and or young adult substance use research and information about drugs and drug use. Four places to start are: Partnership for Drug-Free Kids, Center for Motivation and Change, National Institute on Drug Abuse and HBO Addiction.

11. **Reach out and connect with others.**

While it is tempting to isolate because of the stigma, it is much healthier for everyone involved to reach out and get support. Surround yourselves with supportive friends and family who can help you during this stressful time.

Connect with an objective person such as a coach or counselor to support you. Support groups can also be of help. There are inperson meetings as well as online meetings. Your
local area may offer independent groups as well.

12. **Realize that every situation is different.**

Each person goes down the path of substance use for different reasons. Each solution must meet the needs of the individual person. While some programs work well for others, your child is NOT a failure if a certain program doesn’t meet his or her needs. (Find out what works for you as well!) Meeting with a counselor trained in substance use may be a good place to start.

Be sure to ask for all the options, not just one solution. Look for someone who is open to finding the solutions that meet the needs of the individual, not the other way around. 12 Step Support groups can be helpful. Smart Recovery, Life Ring, and Women in Sobriety are some alternatives.

13. **Do your best to collaborate with your spouse or your child’s other parent.**

It can be confusing and disruptive if your child is getting mixed messages. Put your differences aside and do your best to work with the significant adults that are involved. Your child’s wellbeing is at stake. If you are all giving the same message to your child, it is more productive and helpful.

14. **Plan boundaries and consequences ahead of time.**

It is important to be clear about the boundaries and consequences that you set for your child. Writing your expectations down can be helpful. Communicate the information ahead of time so you are sure that everyone understands. One of the most important things is to make your decisions clear and follow through in a consistent manner. Communicate clearly what you expect and stick with your consequences.

15. **Use positive communication.**

Speak to your child in way that will motivate them to live a healthier life. Your ultimate goal is for your child to stop using drugs. There is more of a chance that your child will listen if you work at developing a positive relationship. Change is not easy, so practice helps. Don’t give up if your first attempts don’t go as well as expected.
16. **Look for what your child is doing well and build on that.**

While sometimes the substance use can overshadow everything else, take the time to notice and acknowledge any positive behavior that you see. It is easy to focus on the negative behaviors when you are stressed and concerned about your child. Everyone is multifaceted, and your child may have positive qualities that you are overlooking. Acknowledge and reinforce the behavior that you want to see so that you can encourage more of it.

“**Acknowledge and reinforce the behavior that you want to see, so that you can encourage more of it.”**

17. **Allow for natural consequences.**

While keeping safety and common sense in mind, allow for the world to be your child’s teacher. Do not cover for or make excuses for your child. This helps your child learn that there are consequences for their actions. Another benefit is that it takes the blame off you. The substance use problem remains the focal point. Of course always keep safety, common sense and your own comfort level in mind.

18. **Acknowledge the emotional pain you feel.**

Your child’s substance use was not anything you planned for. As a parent, you have had to give up or readjust your dream for your child. It is hard to watch your child make poor choices. Work to get past those feelings with awareness, gratitude for what is going well, and forgiveness. When you need a time out, take it. Anticipate how you are going to feel during the process, and notice which of your buttons are continually being pushed. Treat yourself with kindness and self-compassion.

19. **Be knowledgeable about the drug trends in your area.**

Talk to other community members to learn as much as you can about the current drug or alcohol use in your community. Prescription drug use has become somewhat of an epidemic. Be sure you know where your medicines are and store them in a safe place that only you know about. Stay involved in your child’s world.
20. **Do not inadvertently encourage drinking or drug use.**

If you are a parent of a teen, never host any parties where alcohol is served. Monitor the parties that your child attends. Check to make sure that parents will be home and that the party is an alcohol-free event. Think about the language you use and your attitudes towards alcohol and drug use. Studies show that allowing your underage child to drink at home encourages their early substance use.

“Studies show that allowing your underage child to drink at home encourages their early substance use.”

21. **Support the positive activities in your child’s life.**

Sports, art, drama, and music, among others are all activities that can have a positive influence on your child’s life. Look for ways that you can motivate your child to spend time doing activities that he/she loves rather than using substances. While there are no easy answers, the more you can make these positive types of activities attractive to your child, the better.

22. **Develop patience.**

If your child has already started down the road of substance use, know that while things can get better, there is no easy fix. It will take time to get their life back on track. It is a process for your child to change their life and make better choices. Sometimes it is hard to find what your child is doing right, however positive reinforcement can make a difference. It encourages your child to make better choices.

23. **Have compassion, empathy, and understanding.**

These are stressful times for you as well as your child. Remember, you did not cause your child’s substance use. That cannot be said enough. Most parents have only their child’s best interest at heart. Your child’s substance use is not your fault. That being said, there are many things that you can do as a parent to influence your child to have a healthier life. It starts with taking the time to understand why they are using in the first place.
24. Be a role model for your child. Set a good example.

Don’t abuse alcohol or drugs. Children of parents who abuse drugs are at a greater risk of drug addiction. Consider your own personal habits. Are you modeling a healthy lifestyle for your child? Kids — even adult kids — learn from their parent’s example. If you want your child to be healthy, it is essential that you are a healthy role model for your child.

25. Pay attention to all members of the family.

Substance use is time consuming and stressful. Your other children may feel neglected. Give your undivided attention to other family members as much as possible. Everyone in your family needs your attention during this stressful time. That is why it is so important to take care of yourself so that you can make better decisions.
CONCLUSION

There is no quick fix when faced with your child’s drug or alcohol use. A good idea is to learn from others who have gone before you.

Continue to support your child without making excuses for them or shielding them from the consequences of their actions.

You don’t want to turn your back on your child when they need you the most. Instead, remember that your child needs your love now more than ever.

You have more influence than you know. Use that influence to help your child change their life for the better.

Know that there is hope and that you don’t have to struggle alone!
I’M HERE TO HELP. WANT MORE?

Are you ready to get your life back on track so that it doesn’t just revolve around your child with the substance use problem?

Are you interested in receiving support now?

A complimentary strategy session is a great place to get clarity around just how much your child’s drug use is impacting you. If you really want to get your life back on track and help your child in a compassionate way, contact me to set up your strategy session, so we can discuss options for your personal situation.

✔️ CLICK HERE to contact me regarding your strategy session.