



Diagnostic Criteria for Substance Use Disorders

Has your son or daughter displayed symptoms of a substance use disorder within the past 12 months? The DSM-5 states that in order for a person to be diagnosed with a disorder due to substance use, they must display 2 of the following 11 symptoms within 12-months.

- Consuming more alcohol or other substance than originally planned
- Worrying about stopping or consistently failed efforts to control one's use
- Spending a large amount of time using drugs/alcohol, or doing whatever is needed to obtain them
- Use of the substance results in failure to "fulfill major role obligations" such as at home, work, or school.
- "Craving" the substance (alcohol or drug)
- Continuing the use of a substance despite health problems caused or worsened by it. This can be in the domain of mental health (psychological problems may include depressed mood, [sleep](#) disturbance, [anxiety](#), or "blackouts") or physical health.
- Continuing the use of a substance despite its having negative effects in relationships with others (for example, using even though it leads to fights or despite people's objecting to it).
- Repeated use of the substance in a dangerous situation (for example, when having to operate heavy machinery, when driving a car)
- Giving up or reducing activities in a person's life because of the drug/alcohol use
- Building up a tolerance to the alcohol or drug. Tolerance is defined by the DSM-5 as "either needing to use noticeably larger amounts over time to get the desired effect or noticing less of an effect over time after repeated use of the same amount."
- Experiencing withdrawal symptoms after stopping use. Withdrawal symptoms typically include, according to the DSM-5: "anxiety, irritability, fatigue, nausea/vomiting, hand tremor or seizure in the case of alcohol."

Mild substance use disorder – 2 or 3 symptoms. Mild SUD used to be described as "substance abuse." It is true that there are many people who might meet the diagnostic criteria for mild SUD but may not develop addiction. But all those who develop addiction once presented with mild SUD symptoms.

Moderate substance use disorder – 4 or 5 symptoms. Moderate SUD may apply to those who are early in their addiction or to those who appear able to "function" in some important capacities despite having addiction.

Severe substance use disorder – 6 or more symptoms.

Note that it is not necessary to experience withdrawal symptoms to meet the diagnostic criteria even severe substance use disorder. Those who meet the criteria for moderate or severe are considered to have the disease of addiction.