

Advice for family or friends

- Act immediately if you suspect someone close to you are abusing substances.
- Be calm, understanding and supportive, but firm.
- Avoid arguments.
- Encourage the person to seek professional help and offer to assist in making an appointment.



Who to contact

SANCA (South African National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence)

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For more information contact:

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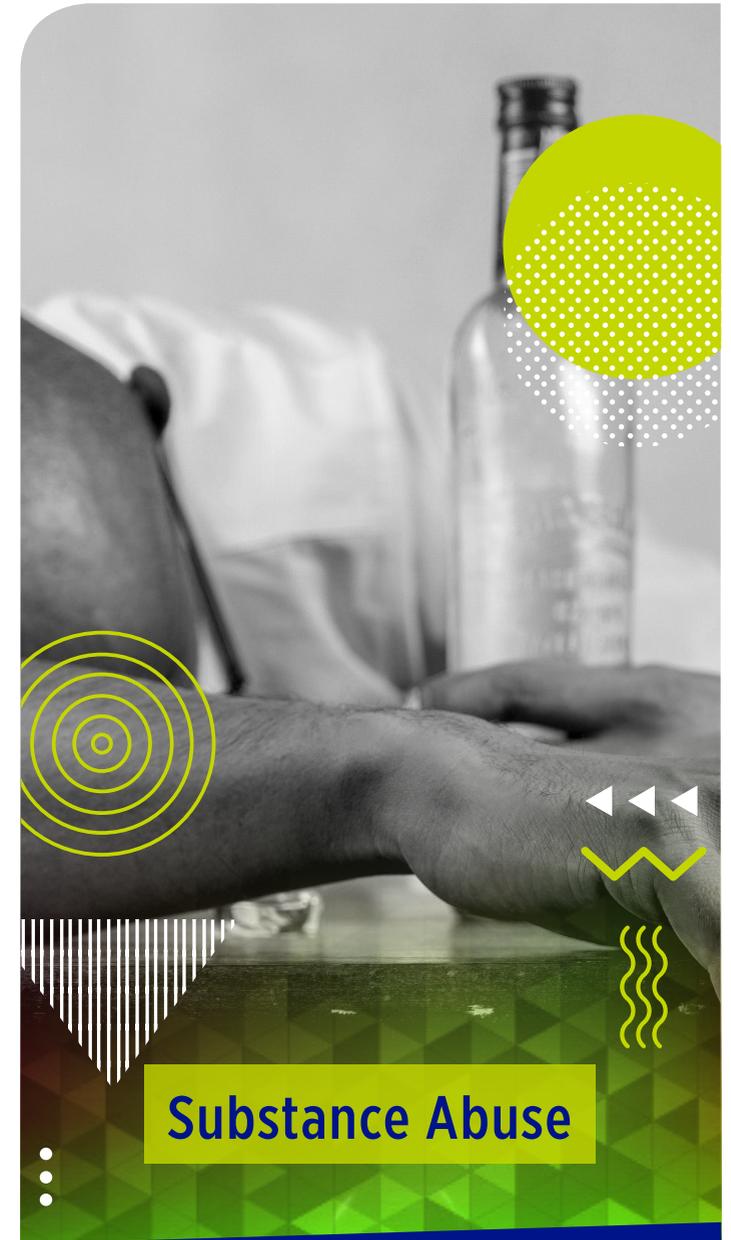
Email: mhic@sun.ac.za

www.mentalhealthsa.org.za

Department of Social Development Hotline: 0800 220 250

Stikland Helpline: 021 940 4496/4429

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MENTAL HEALTH INFORMATION CENTRE
Southern Africa



Background

Substance use disorders are common in South Africa. Substance abuse has a serious effect on physical and mental health, and the social situation of individuals, their families and the communities where they live. These costly disorders also impact on health services, social welfare, education and criminal justice services. Substance use disorders are chronic health problems and cannot be seen as merely the result of lack of willpower or poor morals.

What is a substance use disorder?

Substance use disorders are characterized by problematic substance use that leads to significant distress or impairment. Symptoms from mild to severe include:

- Failed efforts to cut down on substance use
- Failure at work or school and relationship problems as a result of substance use
- Emotional stress for family and friends
- Aggressive or violent behavior
- Craving for the drug
- Daily life revolves around getting hold of the substance
- Continued use of the substance despite awareness of the negative medical, psychological and social effects

Substances of abuse are psychoactive substances which means that they are chemical substances that change a person's mental state by affecting the way the brain and nervous system work. These substances are often used to experience an altered (changed) state of mind e.g. alcohol, cannabis (dagga), hallucinogens, opioids, hypnotics, inhalants, stimulants and anxiolytics. Substance use disorders are often associated with co-morbid psychiatric problems such as mood disorders, anxiety disorders, psychotic disorders, cognitive disorders and personality disorders.

Treatment of substance use disorders

These disorders are chronic and requires ongoing support and care throughout the multi-level treatment process which usually entails the following:

- Identification, preparation for treatment and referral
- Detoxification
- Relapse prevention interventions
- Continuing care

The 'Prevention of and Treatment for Substance Abuse Act' allows for involuntary treatment of someone with a substance use disorder if they are a danger to themselves or others.

CAGE Substance Abuse Screening Tool

CAGE Questions Adapted to Include Drug Use (CAGE-AID)

1. Have you ever felt you ought to cut down on your drinking or drug use?
2. Have people annoyed you by criticizing your drinking or drug use?
3. Have you felt bad or guilty about your drinking or drug use?
4. Have you ever had a drink or used drugs first thing in the morning to steady your nerves or to get rid of a hangover (eye-opener)?

Scoring: Item responses on the CAGE questions are scored 0 for "no" and 1 for "yes" answers, with a higher score being an indication of alcohol problems. A total score of two or greater is considered clinically significant.

The normal cutoff for the CAGE is two positive answers, however, the Consensus Panel recommends that the primary care clinicians lower the threshold to one positive answer to cast a wider net and identify more patients who may have substance abuse disorders. A number of other screening tools are available.

CAGE is derived from the four questions of the tool: Cut down, Annoyed, Guilty, and Eye-opener

CAGE Source: Ewing 1984

