

Explore Chapter 7

This chapter explores how caregivers can support a loved one dealing with schizophrenia and substance use disorders.



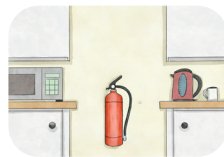
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Fast Facts

Substance use disorder is a mental health condition, not just a matter of poor choices - it's a brain disorder that requires understanding and proper care.

When supporting a loved one with schizophrenia and substance use disorders, particularly during crises like psychosis, depression, or violent behavior, **it is essential to act in a calm and informed manner.**

Early support can change the outcome. Open communication, connection to resources, and timely intervention can help prevent worsening substance use and its consequences.

Comprehensive treatments can bring recovery closer. Combining medication with therapy and physical health care is essential to improving the quality of life for people with schizophrenia and substance use disorders.

7.1

Family support paves recovery



Did you know that **1 in 4 people** will step up as a caregiver for a loved one at some point in their lives?

Among young individuals, mental health challenges are a leading reason for needing support, with 90% receiving care for these conditions.

Caring for a loved one with schizophrenia can be challenging, and **many family members often feel overwhelmed** by the weight of this responsibility. Schizophrenia and substance use disorder (SUD) often go hand in hand, sharing genetic and neurobiological factors.

“**The comorbidity of schizophrenia and substance use disorders is not an exception - it’s rather a common reality.**”

The essential role of family

When schizophrenia and substance use disorder (SUD) intersect, the **complexity of managing both conditions** increases, making it difficult for individuals to get the right care.

This **"collision of complexity"** often leads to poorer health outcomes, especially for those dealing with severe and long-term mental illnesses.

That’s why **support and understanding from loved ones are vital at every stage**. Family and friends play a crucial role in walking this journey alongside individuals with schizophrenia and SUD, **helping them find stability and hope**.

Even when a loved one seems uncooperative or lacks insight, it doesn’t mean progress is impossible. Consistent **CARE AND COMPASSION TRULY MAKE A DIFFERENCE**, bringing both healing and hope.

Reframing addiction: a treatable brain disorder

For much of history, substance use disorder was misrepresented, often viewed as a moral failing rather than a medical condition. Those struggling were **unfairly labeled** with terms like “addict,” **reinforcing stigma and shame**.

Thanks to advances in neuroscience, we now understand that substance use disorder is a **complex brain disorder**.

Substance use disorders (SUDs) are closely linked creating a **two-way relationship**: people with mental health conditions may turn to drugs and using substances can increase the likelihood of developing mental health disorders.

This occurs because **substances affect the same brain circuits involved in mental health regulation**.

Although **SUD** is a chronic, progressive illness that can lead to relapses, the most important fact is that it **is treatable**.

New advances in treatment

Recent studies offer hope. In an observational study, scientists followed individuals with schizophrenia who also struggled with cocaine addiction. Each patient received **tailored antipsychotic treatment based on their needs**.

The study included people who were either actively using cocaine or had done so within the past three months.

The results were encouraging:

Nearly **60% EITHER STOPPED USING** (cca half of patients) or **SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCED THEIR USE**.

70% showed improvements in symptoms and overall behavior.

These findings show **the potential of comprehensive, consistent treatment** to help individuals regain control of their lives.

“**Recovery is possible, and with the right support, long-term healing becomes an achievable reality.**”

7.2 Beyond stigma

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Schizophrenia and substance use disorders are among the most stigmatized mental health conditions.

People living with these conditions often face **negative stereotypes**, with many perceiving them as dangerous, unpredictable, or less capable than those with other mental health issues.

“This stigma leads to discrimination, fear, social avoidance, and rejection.

Public attitudes differ between the two conditions

Attitudes toward these conditions differ significantly. Individuals with substance use disorders (SUD) are often **blamed** for their illness, and seen as having personal failings, which **leads to anger and reluctance to offer help**.

In contrast, those with schizophrenia are more likely to be recognized as having a legitimate mental illness, with many supporting the idea of forced treatment.

Unfortunately, **stigma has severe consequences for both groups**. It creates barriers to employment, increases social isolation, lowers self-esteem, and discourages people from seeking treatment.

Reducing stigma and its resulting discrimination is essential for improving the overall well-being of those living with these conditions.

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How caregivers can combat stigma while supporting loved ones

Caring for someone with both schizophrenia and substance use disorder can be particularly challenging. However, recent studies provide **evidence-based strategies** to help caregivers **combat stigma** and **provide meaningful support**:

EDUCATION AND PSYCHOEDUCATION.

Understanding the symptoms and treatment options for schizophrenia and substance use disorders helps caregivers better manage their loved one's condition more effectively. Educated caregivers can also combat misinformation and stigma, benefiting both themselves and their loved ones.

EMOTIONAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT.

Caregivers often experience **"affiliate stigma"**, feeling the effects of the stigma directed toward the person they care for.

FAMILY-BASED PSYCHOEDUCATION PROGRAMS.

have been shown to reduce stress, improve coping strategies, and lessen stigma's impact, leading to **better caregiving experiences**.

ACCESS TO COUNSELING AND PEER SUPPORT. Caregivers may struggle with feelings of isolation, guilt, or burden. Support groups and counseling provide essential relief, fostering resilience and ensuring the **sustainability of long-term caregiving.**

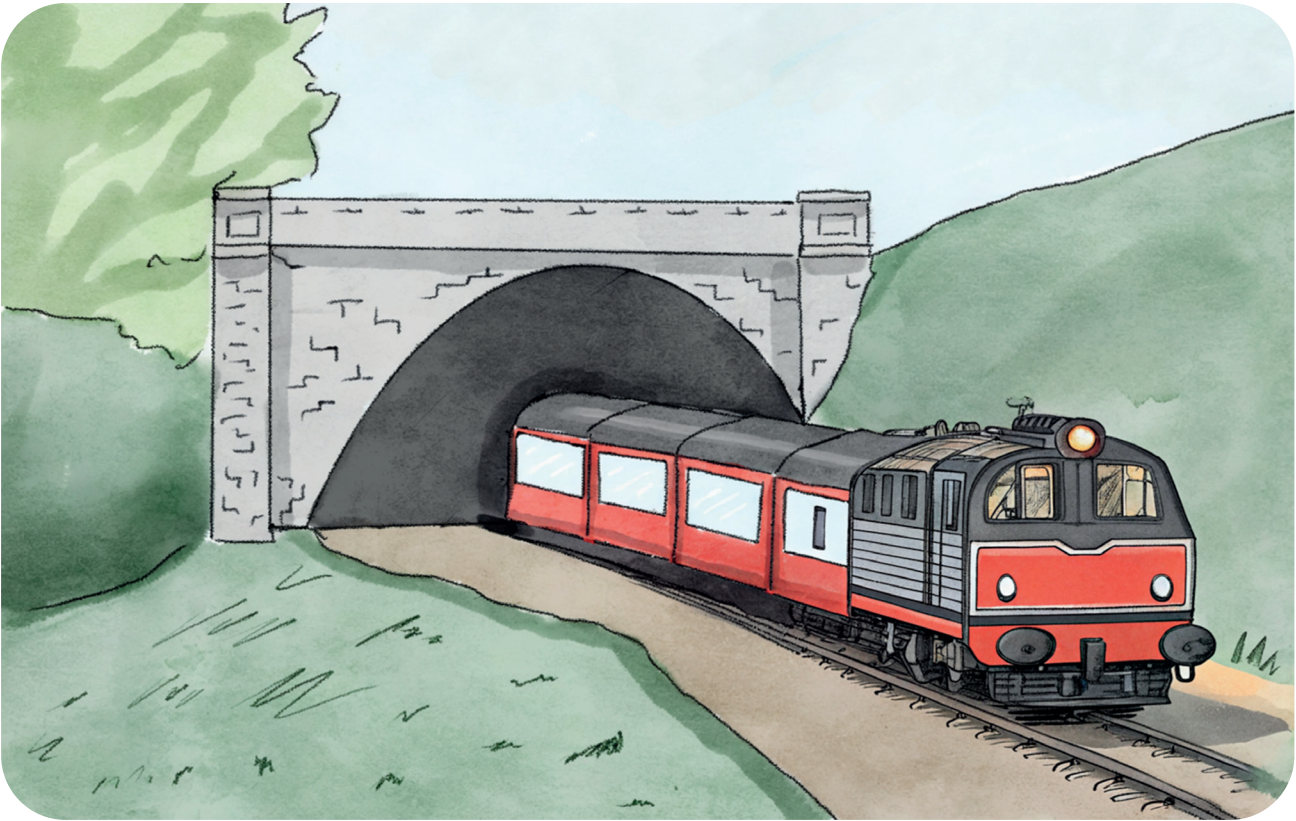
ADVOCATE FOR RECOVERY-ORIENTED SERVICES. Encouraging the use of recovery-oriented services that integrate both mental health and addiction treatment can **reduce stigma and improve outcomes.** Collaborating with professionals and peer workers who understand the recovery model is essential. This also involves advocating for policies that provide holistic and integrated care, which can ease the stigma surrounding these dual conditions.

COPING STRATEGIES AND STRESS MANAGEMENT. Research shows that caregivers with strong coping mechanisms and social support networks experience lower stress levels. Prioritizing **self-care**, seeking **respite** when needed, and **understanding** what to expect from the healthcare system can help caregivers manage stress and reduce the stigma they encounter.

By staying informed, advocating for better care, and prioritizing their own well-being, caregivers can play a vital role in **breaking down stigma and improving outcomes for their loved ones.**

7.3

Continuous care is key to recovery



Rates of remission in people with substance use disorders vary depending on the type of substance.

A U.S. study found **REMISSION** rates of **83.7% for tobacco, 90.6% for alcohol, 97.2% for cannabis,** and an impressive **99.2% for cocaine.**

However, **RELAPSE** remains a big concern.

Alarminglly, about **50% of people recovering from tobacco** use relapse **within the 1st year.**

Within **3 years**, approximately **20%** of those who have recovered from **cocaine use** may relapse, while over **50% of individuals with alcohol use** disorders do so.

While the risk of relapse decreases with sustained remission, it never entirely disappears. This emphasizes the **need for ongoing support and intervention!**

Early Support Matters

Early support plays an **essential role** in the successful recovery of individuals with schizophrenia and substance use.

Once a substance use disorder develops, it often becomes a **chronic condition**, leading to **lasting changes** in the brain.

These changes are compounded by various mental health and social challenges that individuals may face.

While abstaining from substance use can eventually help restore normal brain function, the degree of recovery differs depending on several factors, including:

- **specific substance used,**
- **duration of the disorder,**
- **level of support** received during recovery.

Most individuals with SUDs experience **cycles of remission and relapse**, reinforcing the **need for early intervention and long-term consistent support.**

Recognizing early signs of substance use

Early intervention is key, particularly given the strong link between early substance use and the risk of developing SUDs.

Recognizing **signs of use, such as sudden changes in behavior or mood** can open the door to important conversations.

Engaging in a **compassionate, non-judgmental dialogue** about these concerns can create a **supportive environment** for individuals to share their experiences and challenges.

Helping loved ones before addiction takes hold: understanding pre-addiction

Substance misuse is far more common than full-blown addiction, yet even **moderate use can be a warning sign.** If ignored, substance use can transition to substance use disorder (SUD) and lead to more severe consequences.

To address this early stage of substance use, experts have introduced the concept of **“pre-addiction”**, a term inspired by “pre-diabetes.”

The term **"pre-addiction" refers to the early stages of substance use** that haven't yet developed into a severe addiction. Much like "pre-diabetes," this concept encourages early recognition and intervention to prevent further progression to severe SUDs.

For caregivers, understanding "pre-addiction" means recognizing that even **mild or moderate substance use can be a sign of vulnerability.**

By acting early - through **support, open communication, and connection to resources** - healthcare providers and caregivers can potentially **prevent many**

negative outcomes associated with unhealthy substance use and stop the transition to substance use disorders. This approach **helps both individuals and caregivers** to prevent long-term harm and support a healthier, more stable future.

How caregivers can help early detection of SUD



Encourage open conversations.

Create a **safe space** where your loved one feels comfortable discussing substance use. A simple question or expression of concern can spark meaningful dialogue.



Know the screening tools.

Familiarize yourself with common screening methods and criteria. **Understanding what healthcare providers assess** can help you spot early signs of problematic use.



Advocate for screening.

If you suspect substance use, **encourage** your loved one **to discuss** it with their doctor. Suggest that they ask specific questions about their substance use during appointments.



Observe behavioral changes.

Watch for **shifts** in mood, health, or daily habits that could signal substance misuse. If you notice **concerning signs**, it may be a good time to initiate a conversation about seeking help.



Encourage professional support.

If screening reveals a problem, help your loved one **find resources or treatment**. Your **guidance and support** can increase their willingness to seek help.



Use informal screening at home.

While formal screenings are essential, you can also ask informal questions to recognize substance use. Simple, non-judgmental questions about drinking habits or medication use can be a starting point for deeper conversations.

“Chronic Care Model” for long-term care

Achieving the best outcomes for individuals with substance use disorders (SUDs) requires long-term care.

One effective approach is the **Chronic Care Model**, originally designed for diabetes, is now effectively used for SUDs, emphasizing **continuous care**, which leads to **better management** of the disorder **over time**.

For instance, a person who has recently relapsed may need **frequent check-ins or medication adjustments**, whereas someone in sustained recovery may require less intensive care. **Lifestyle changes** - such as reducing substance use and joining support groups - can significantly increase long-term recovery success.

The Chronic Care Model **integrates SUD treatment into regular medical care**, increasing accessibility and lowering costs. It **tailors care to individual needs** - some may only need community resources or primary care support, while others benefit from specialized outpatient or inpatient programs.

This ensures **personalized care without overwhelming healthcare systems**.

Screening tools to assess substance use habits

One of the most significant opportunities in healthcare today is the **early detection** of substance use disorders (SUDs).










By being **proactive and engaged, caregivers** can significantly contribute to the early identification of substance use issues.

Tools like the **Alcohol, Smoking, and Substance Involvement Screening Test (ASSIST)** and the **Tobacco, Alcohol, Prescription Medication, and Other Substance (TAPS)** are designed to quickly assess substance use habits.

For example, ASSIST includes simple questions that can help determine whether someone’s alcohol or drug use is hazardous or harmful.

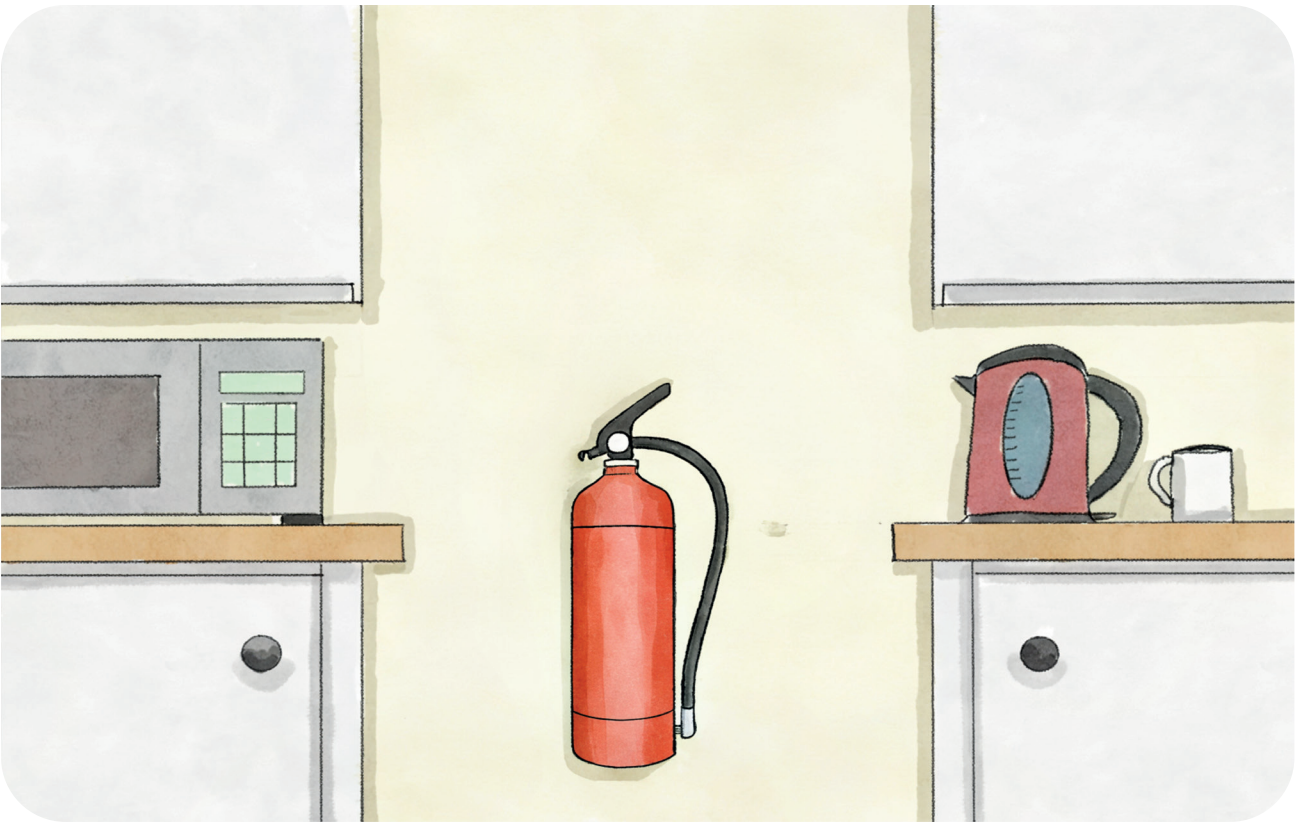
These screenings can happen during routine medical appointments, providing an excellent opportunity to catch issues early.

Supporting a loved one’s journey: tips for caregivers

-  **A stable daily routine** can provide security and may help reduce substance use over time.
-  **Gently reminding** your loved one about their treatment plan, including prescribed medications, can be helpful. If they’re struggling to keep up, **discussing challenges in a caring, open way** may lead to solutions.
-  **Keeping communication open** encourages honesty. A **judgment-free space** makes it easier for them to share their struggles with substance use and other challenges.
-  **Watching for mood or behavior changes** allows you to **address potential relapse early**.
-  **Encouraging stress management** through mindfulness, exercise, or enjoyable hobbies can support their well-being.
-  **Connecting with mental health professionals** experienced in schizophrenia and substance use disorders can provide **specialized guidance and resources**.
-  **Supporting participation in recovery programs**, such as 12-step groups, can offer connection and encouragement, which can be **reassuring** during difficult times.
-  **Recovery involves progress and setbacks.** Offering your emotional support along the way and **celebrating even small victories** can be deeply motivating.
-  **Prioritize your own well-being.** Caregiving is demanding, so practicing self-care and seeking support ensures you **remain resilient**.

“With compassion and patience, you can provide meaningful support, helping your loved one facing schizophrenia and substance use challenges toward recovery.”

7.4 How to manage a crisis?



When supporting people with schizophrenia and substance use disorders, particularly during crises like psychosis, depression, or violent behavior, it is essential to act in a calm and informed manner.

Here are key steps to take, considering both the mental health condition and substance misuse.

Dealing with psychosis

In moments of psychosis, adopting a **CALM, NON-CONFRONTATIONAL APPROACH** may help deescalate the situation.

It could be beneficial to **avoid contradicting or arguing against the person's delusions**, as this could increase distress.

Instead, **listening empathetically** and acknowledging their feelings, without confirming false beliefs, might create a sense of safety.

For example, a gentle statement like,

"It sounds like this is really frightening for you..."

might offer support without intensifying confusion.

Maintaining safety can be important, especially if the person seems to pose a risk to themselves or others.

Ensuring the environment is quiet and **reducing external stimulation** may prevent escalation while waiting for professional help.

Dealing with violence

In situations involving potential violence, **PERSONAL SAFETY IS ALWAYS A PRIORITY**.

It can be helpful to **maintain a safe distance**, particularly if there is any risk of harm.

Removing dangerous objects from the vicinity and **avoiding any form of confrontation** or aggression may reduce the likelihood of an outburst.

If the situation remains volatile, **contacting trained professionals** - such as emergency services - could help the person receiving appropriate care.

Dealing with depression

For someone experiencing depression, simply **OFFERING AN EMPATHETIC, NON-JUDGMENTAL SPACE** to express their feelings might help them feel heard.

Acknowledging their distress with phrases like,

"I hear that you're going through a tough time..."

can convey support.

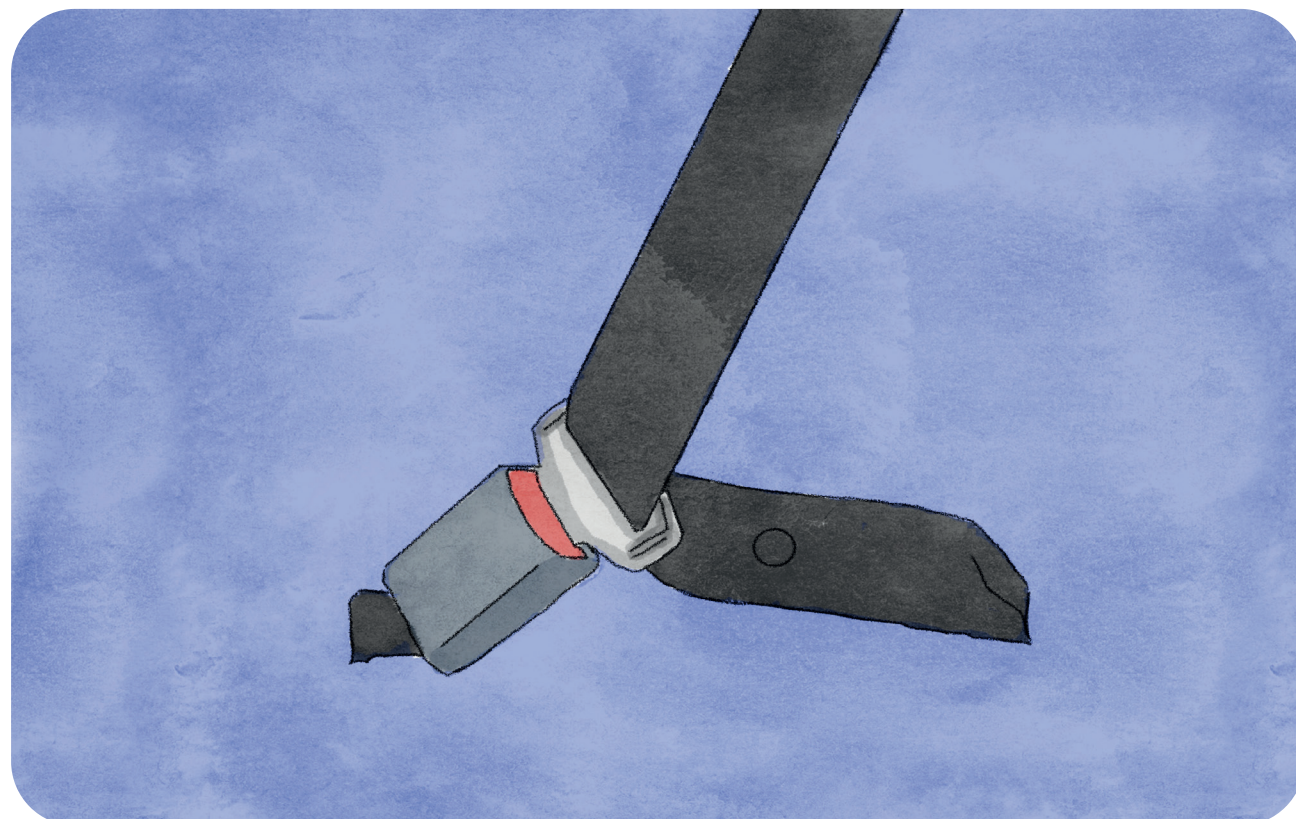
If the depression seems severe or there are signs of suicidal thoughts, **gently encouraging them to connect with a mental health professional** could be life-saving.

By focusing on calm communication, safety, and accessing professional help, you can make a positive difference in these challenging situations.

If you are unsure how to proceed, it's always advisable to contact mental health professionals or crisis helplines for immediate guidance.

7.5 Preventing substance use in schizophrenia

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By embracing harm reduction, caregivers can help their loved ones stay safer while supporting their journey toward stability and recovery.

How can caregivers prevent substance use in people with schizophrenia?

Caregivers can play a **MAJOR ROLE** in preventing substance use in people with schizophrenia. Primary prevention focuses on reducing risk factors and strengthening protective ones to delay or avoid substance use.

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Caregivers can:



Promote healthy coping strategies.

Encourage **non-substance-related ways** to manage stress and schizophrenia symptoms, such as therapy, exercise, or hobbies.



Recognize early warning signs. Learn to identify signs of substance misuse, particularly in vulnerable individuals. Addressing risky behaviors early **enables timely intervention and support** before addiction develops. Educating individuals about the dangers of drug use, including overdose, is essential.



Family and community support. Help create a supportive environment by reducing stigma and encouraging open discussions about mental health and substance use. Strengthening family bonds and relationships provides a **protective support system**.

What are “harm reduction strategies” and how can they support people with both substance use and schizophrenia?

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HARM REDUCTION STRATEGIES

offer a compassionate and practical way to support people with both schizophrenia and substance use disorders. They focus on **reducing the negative impacts of substance use** while addressing mental health needs. These strategies **do not require quitting immediately**, making them more accessible and effective for those who may not be ready or able to stop using substances right away.

Here are some scientifically supported harm-reduction strategies:

SUPERVISED CONSUMPTION SITES

These facilities offer **a safe, controlled environment** where individuals can use substances under medical supervision. This reduces the risk of overdose and provides access to immediate medical care, while also connecting patients with mental health services that support schizophrenia management.

Additionally, distributing **life-saving interventions to reverse overdoses** and providing **training** on their use can be lifesaving, especially in high-risk situations.

Integrated care and **case management** are also very important, as they ensure that psychiatric care and addiction services are **coordinated to address both** conditions simultaneously.

PEER SUPPORT NETWORKS.

Utilizing recovery coaches or peer supporters with lived experience can significantly benefit individuals facing dual schizophrenia. These networks provide emotional support, reduce stigma, and promote recovery with trust and understanding between caregivers and those in need.

“By embracing harm reduction, caregivers can help their loved ones stay safer while supporting their journey toward stability and recovery.”

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How can a supportive home environment transform the lives of those with schizophrenia and substance use disorders?

Creating a supportive environment for individuals living with schizophrenia and substance use disorders involves several key components that foster safety, stability, and well-being:



Establishing a safe and structured home environment is crucial, as it provides a sense of security that can alleviate anxiety and promote recovery.



Consistency and routine help individuals navigate their daily lives, making it easier to manage symptoms and reducing stress associated with unpredictability.



Encouraging healthy habits, including balanced nutrition, regular exercise, and good sleep hygiene, is essential, as these practices contribute to overall mental and physical health.

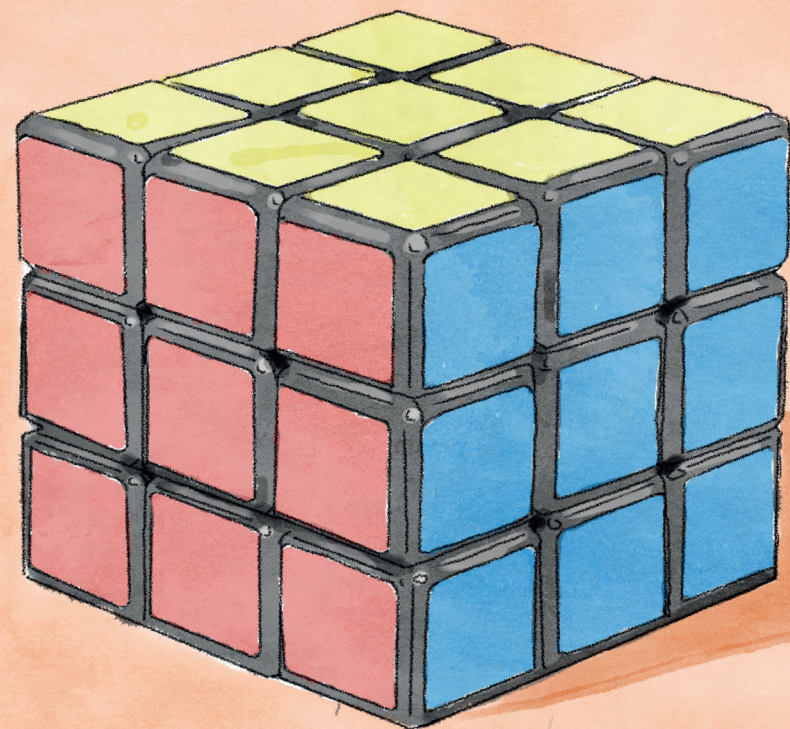


Identifying potential triggers - such as stressors, certain environments, or substance use - and implementing **strategies to manage crises** can significantly enhance stability and prevent exacerbation of symptoms.

By focusing on these aspects, caregivers can create a nurturing environment that supports the individual's recovery journey.

7.6

Maximizing treatment outcomes



Comprehensive treatments can bring recovery closer.

Treating people who have both schizophrenia and substance use disorders is complex and requires more than just medication. Recent research highlights a few key points for improving treatment:

HOLISTIC CARE. Since these individuals often struggle with both physical and mental health issues, it's important to provide care that **treats both at the same time**. For example, heart disease, diabetes, and substance abuse often occur alongside schizophrenia, so addressing these issues together can improve overall health and well-being.

MEDICATION SUPPORT. Certain medications, particularly newer antipsychotics, can help manage symptoms of both psychosis and addiction. These drugs work by stabilizing brain chemistry, making it easier to control symptoms and cravings. However, **using the right medication and monitoring for side effects** is crucial for long-term success.

THERAPY AND SOCIAL SUPPORT. Medication alone isn't enough for most people. **Therapy**, including cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), helps individuals manage substance use and improve everyday skills like holding a job or maintaining relationships. **Peer support groups** and **community programs** are also key to helping patients stay on track and avoid relapses.

PREVENTING RELAPSES.

Since the risk of relapse is high for both substance use and schizophrenia symptoms, **long-term treatment plans** focus on ongoing support, medication management, and therapy to help individuals stay healthy and stable.

Recent studies emphasize that a personalized, integrated treatment plan combining medication with therapy and physical health care is essential to improving the quality of life for these patients.

Why are pharmacological treatments essential for recovery?

Pharmacological treatments are essential for individuals dealing with both substance use disorders and psychiatric conditions, like schizophrenia. Medications can effectively address symptoms related to substance misuse while also helping manage mental health issues.

Selecting the right medication requires **careful consideration** and **ongoing monitoring** to ensure its effectiveness.

To achieve the best results, it's crucial to **integrate pharmacological interventions within a comprehensive treatment plan**.

This plan should also incorporate psychotherapy and social support, maximizing the benefits of medications.

By taking this holistic approach, caregivers can better support individuals with dual schizophrenia in their recovery journey.

Caregiver’s crucial role in improving treatment outcomes

MEDICATION ADHERENCE.

Caregivers can assist by ensuring their loved ones **consistently take prescribed medications**.

This support can **reduce relapse rates** and hospitalization.

PARTICIPATION IN THERAPY.

Encouraging or attending therapy sessions (such as family psychoeducation) can be beneficial. These programs **help caregivers understand** schizophrenia and SUD, reducing their burden and increasing their knowledge. They have been shown to **improve both patient and caregiver outcomes**.

MONITORING SYMPTOMS.

Caregivers can help by **keeping track** of symptoms or any warning signs of relapse or worsening substance use. This can help healthcare providers **adjust treatment plans promptly**.

BUILDING THERAPEUTIC ALLIANCES. Using communication strategies like LEAP (Listen, Empathize, Agree, Partner) helps caregivers **build trust** with their loved ones, which can encourage them to **stay engaged in treatment**.

PROVIDING A COMFORTABLE ENVIRONMENT. Caregivers can establish a **routine** and ensure a supportive environment at home. This **stability** is important for maintaining sobriety and managing schizophrenia.

Non-drug therapies

In addition to medication, guidelines recommend combining it with non-drug therapies. These include **PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERVENTIONS** and forms of therapy such as **COGNITIVE-BEHAVIORAL THERAPY (CBT)** and **FAMILY THERAPY**.


These approaches can provide **additional support and help** patients manage their symptoms, improve daily functioning, and enhance their overall quality of life. **INTEGRATING** these therapies with medication creates a more comprehensive treatment plan for people living with schizophrenia.


Motivational Interviewing (MI)

MI is a conversation technique designed to **help people find their reasons** for making positive changes in their lives.

It’s helpful for those who feel unsure about their substance use or mental health treatment. MI can **encourage a stronger sense of responsibility** and help them become more engaged in their treatment plans.

It’s a **supportive and non-judgmental approach** that helps people explore their goals and **build motivation** for change.

 **Key Techniques:** Reflective listening, eliciting change talk, and supporting self-efficacy.


 **Scientific Evidence:** MI has positively reduced substance use in people with schizophrenia.


Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)

CBT is widely used to treat both schizophrenia and substance use disorders (SUDs), including opioid and stimulant use.

For patients with schizophrenia, CBT focuses on **altering delusional thinking** and **reducing the emotional distress** linked to psychotic symptoms. In individuals with SUDs, it helps identify triggers, manage cravings, and prevent relapse.

Combining these approaches allows therapists to **address patients’ unique challenges** with dual disorders.

 **Key Techniques:** Cognitive restructuring, behavioral activation, and psychoeducation.


 **Scientific Evidence:** Studies show that CBT can improve both psychiatric symptoms and reduce substance use in patients with schizophrenia and SUDs.

Contingency management (CM)

CM is a treatment method that gives patients **rewards**, like gift cards or vouchers, when they meet specific goals, such as staying drug-free.

CM can be adapted for individuals with schizophrenia to encourage them to stick with both their mental health and substance use treatments, **offering extra motivation** through **positive reinforcement**. This approach makes treatment more **engaging and rewarding** for patients.


 **Key Techniques:** Voucher systems, reward-based interventions.


 **Scientific Evidence:** CM has proven particularly effective in reducing stimulant use, like cocaine or methamphetamine, and can also help reduce opioid use, in schizophrenia patients.

Family psychoeducation

Family Psychoeducation provides families with **education about schizophrenia, addiction, and coping strategies** to help manage the dual challenges.

By **improving family support**, patients are more likely to adhere to treatment, avoid relapse, and manage psychiatric symptoms.


 **Key Techniques:** Psychoeducation workshops, coping skills training, crisis intervention.


 **Scientific Evidence:** Family interventions have demonstrated improved outcomes in relapse prevention and functional recovery for dual schizophrenia patients.

Social skills training (SST)

SST focuses on **improving social functioning**, which is often impaired in schizophrenia patients.


It can be combined with interventions targeting substance use by **incorporating role-play, communication exercises, and problem-solving strategies** to help individuals avoid high-risk situations for substance use.


 **Key Techniques:** Role-playing, reinforcement of positive social interactions.

 **Scientific Evidence:** SST is shown to improve quality of life, social outcomes, and adherence to treatment in dual-diagnosis patients .

Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs)

Mindfulness-based interventions, such as **Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)**, have been increasingly studied for both schizophrenia and substance use disorders. Mindfulness practices help patients **increase awareness of their thoughts, feelings, and cravings**, making it easier to manage distress and avoid substance use triggers.


 **Key Techniques:** Meditation, body scan exercises, and mindfulness breathing.


 **Scientific Evidence:** MBIs have been linked to reductions in substance cravings and improvements in psychiatric symptoms.

Assertive community treatment (ACT)

ACT is an intensive, team-based approach aimed at helping individuals with severe mental illness, like schizophrenia, who have a **history of treatment non-compliance, homelessness, or substance use**.

The ACT team provides case management, medical and psychiatric care, substance use counseling, and daily living support.

 **Key Techniques:** Outreach, continuous monitoring, and treatment in the community.

 **Scientific Evidence:** ACT is effective in reducing hospitalizations, improving adherence, and promoting recovery in dual-diagnosis patients.

Staying informed helps you handle challenges confidently and offers the needed support for individuals with schizophrenia and substance use disorder.

By familiarizing yourself with the specific substances that may be present in their lives - such as tobacco, alcohol, cannabis and stimulants - you can gain insight into the risks associated with each one.

This understanding can help you in early identification of potential issues and effective support and intervention.

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