Getting Help for Substance Use – For New Parents

Substance Use

Substances - like alcohol and drugs - change the way our brain works. One of the first changes that happens is that substances take over the part of our brain that controls our cravings. Soon people find themselves taking substances more often and in larger amounts.

Having a baby can be physically and emotionally difficult. Some people who stop using substances during pregnancy start again after birth. Others may find themselves using more heavily after having a baby.

Fortunately, people - including new parents - can and do recover from substance use.

Steps Toward Recovery and Having a Healthy Baby

1

Step 1: Make an Appointment at Your Clinic

A supportive doctor, nurse, or other healthcare provider can help you decide what treatments are best for you. Depending on what substances you use, taking certain medications can decrease your cravings, reduce withdrawal symptoms, and help you heal. Also, getting care reduces you and your baby's health risks.

2

Step 2: Connect with Your Culture

The opposite of addiction is connection. Our cultural teachings have helped us understand how to live well for generations. Participating in traditional practices and ceremonies can be healing for new parents and their families.

3

Step 3: Talk it Out

Talking with a counselor can help you change behaviors related to substance use. It can also help if you are experiencing any conditions – like anxiety or depression. These conditions are common during pregnancy and the first year after your baby is born. Also, let friends and family know what you are going through. Having a strong support system can help you on your journey.

4

Step 4: Protect Yourself from Overdosing

Starting to use substances again after a break or using more heavily can put you at risk for an overdose. Many new parents are at risk for overdosing. To protect yourself, find someone you trust, like a family member, friend, or provider, and discuss a plan for how you can cope with triggers and stay safe if you happen to use substances.

Family Care PLANS

NPAIHB
Indian Leadership for Indian Health

If you use opioids – like heroin, morphine, or oxycodone – part of protecting yourself should also include learning to use naloxone and keeping it on hand. Naloxone often comes as a nose spray. It is a medication that can help quickly reverse an opioid overdose.

To get naloxone (also known as Narcan), contact your local Tribal clinic, IHS facility, or visit your local pharmacy. If you have trouble accessing naloxone, contact naloxone@npaihb.org or call 503-228-4185.

Your Rights

Pregnant people who use substances have the right to be treated with dignity and respect.

It is important that those helping you:

- **Use kind and respectful language**
  It is unkind to call someone an "addict" or "junkie." These words label a person based on only one activity they do in life. You are a whole person with many different interests, hobbies, and gifts. If people on your team use words that make you feel uncomfortable, ask them to stop. If they do not, see another provider.

Kind and respectful language includes using what is called person-first language. For example, saying "people who use drugs," instead of saying "drug users."

- **Are non-judgmental**
  Substance use disorder is a health issue that impacts many people. It can happen to anyone. Seek out people who are non-judgmental and support you based on what you and your family need.

- **Respect your decisions**
  Some people are not ready to stop taking substances completely. If this is the case for you, work with individuals that can help you develop strategies to protect your safety and reduce your baby's risk while you continue to take substances.

Be Kind to Yourself

You have many positive qualities and deserve to be your best self. Remember that it's ok to struggle as you work toward making a better life for you, your family, and your baby. We are all in the process of learning different life skills to be happier and healthier. Judgment and unkindness – even when it's from ourselves - only stands in the way. As your journey continues, so will your understanding of how to care for yourself and your family.

Visit the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board's website at indiancountryecho.org/family-care-plans-toolkit to learn more about substance use, getting help, and other important topics.

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