

ADDICTION AND DUAL DIAGNOSIS

Dual diagnosis (also referred to as co-occurring disorders) is a term for individuals with both mental health and substance use disorders. This is common with addiction! It is estimated that more than 50% of people with substance abuse disorder also suffer from a mental health issues such as clinical depression, bi-polar or anxiety disorder.

It is difficult to tell the difference between addiction and mental health symptoms because they often mimic each other. Those with mental illness and addiction may not consistently take medications prescribed by their physician and the addiction can sometimes mask the mental illness.

The symptoms of one disorder will usually worsen the symptoms of the other and can lead to relapse.

It is therefore imperative that both disorders are treated. A person should be 'clean and sober' for a period of at least 2 weeks, preferably 4, in order for a proper diagnosis to be determined by a qualified psychiatrist who specializes in addiction and dual diagnosis.

The best option for your loved one with mental health issues and a substance abuse problem may be a comprehensive Dual Diagnosis treatment program.

Parents and friends of the loved one suffering from a dual diagnosis can educate themselves on the symptoms and complexities of the mental illness. Speaking the truth in love, while keeping healthy boundaries, can positively influence your loved one.

And, of course, as always, have good self-care, deal with your stress through healthy life balance and boundaries, stay connected with your support system within your community, and keep your spiritual life alive and well.

*Kristen Smith, LMFT, LISAC