

Adolescent SUD IOP: What Success Looks Like – Making it Happen

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Adolescent substance is complex, evolving, and deeply connected to mental health, family systems, peer influence, trauma exposure, and community factors. Effective response requires collaboration, clarity, and compassion.

This guide offers practical, action-oriented insights for mental health professionals, social workers, court and legal professionals, educators, and community partners.

UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

- Adolescents use substances for different reasons than adults: identity formation, peer belonging, impulsivity, trauma response, and neurodevelopmental vulnerability.
- Co-occurring mental health conditions are the rule, not the exception.
- Early, structured intervention significantly improves long-term outcomes.

Awareness is prevention. Engagement is intervention.

LEVELS OF CARE: MATCHING INTENSITY TO NEED

Adolescent treatment works best when services match clinical severity:

- **Outpatient (OP):** Early intervention, mild to moderate use.
- **Intensive Outpatient (IOP):** Moderate to high-risk use, co-occurring disorders, court involvement
- **Partial Hospitalization/Residential:** High acuity, safety concerns
- **Recovery Support & Aftercare:** Long-term stabilization

WHY ADOLESCENT SUD IOP?

Adolescent IOP provides :

- 9+ hours of structured weekly therapy
- Integrated co-occurring mental health treatment
- Skill-building and relapse prevention
- Accountability with developmental sensitivity
- Court/probation collaboration when needed
- Peer support in a clinically facilitated environment

WHAT MAKES ADOLESCENT IOP DIFFERENT FROM ADULT IOP?

Adolescent Focus

- Family system integration
- Skill development & identity formation
- School & peer dynamics
- Developmental neuroscience

Adult Focus

- Individual autonomy
- Recovery stabilization
- Work & family roles
- Lifestyle restructuring

Adolescents require structure, mentorship, and guided accountability – not simply abstinence expectations.

MAKING SUCCESS HAPPEN: ACTION STEPS FOR PROFESSIONALS

1. **Engage Families Early**
 - a. Normalize family involvement as treatment, not punishment.
 - b. Provide psychoeducation of brain development and substance impact.
 - c. Encourage consistent expectation across home and system partners.
2. **Collaborate Across Systems**
 - a. Align goals between therapy, court, probation, schools, and parents.
 - b. Use clear communication to reinforce progress.
 - c. Focus on behavior change over compliance alone.
3. **Utilize Harm Reduction Strategically**
 - a. Meet adolescents where they are.
 - b. Reduce immediate risk while building motivation.
 - c. Reinforce safer choices as steps toward long-term stability.
4. **Support Abstinence-Based Recovery When Appropriate**
 - a. Encourage peer support (e.g., recovery groups).
 - b. Build pro-social sober leisure activities.
 - c. Develop structured relapse prevention plans.
5. **Strengthen Community Connections (Michigan & Kent County)**
 - a. Recovery coaching services
 - b. Family support programs
 - c. School-based counseling
 - d. Local prevention coalitions
 - e. Peer recovery communities

Community engagement increases long-term recovery capital.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

Success in adolescent SUD IOP is not perfection.

It looks like:

- Improved emotional regulation.
- Increased honesty and accountability.
- Reduced substance use frequency or risk behaviors.
- Stronger family communication.
- Engagement in school/work.
- A growing internal motivation for change.

Small, consistent behavioral shifts lead to long-term recovery trajectories.

WEDGWOOD IS HERE TO HELP!

For consultation, collaboration, or referral:

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"Recovery is not about controlling the future. It is about being fully present in this moment and choosing the next right step."