

Dual-Diagnosis Treatment Explained for Families

Understanding Why Addiction and Mental Health Must Be Treated Together



What Is Dual-Diagnosis?

Dual-Diagnosis refers to the co-occurrence of a mental health disorder and a substance use disorder in the same individual.

These conditions are not separate problems that happen to overlap. They are deeply interconnected, each making the other worse. For families, understanding this connection explains why past treatment attempts may have failed and why a different approach is needed.

Understanding the Connection

Mental Health Conditions Drive Substance Use

Untreated symptoms of anxiety, depression, and trauma create suffering that substances temporarily relieve. This “self-medication” leads to dependence.

- Alcohol lifts depression; sedatives quiet anxiety
- Stimulants provide focus for untreated ADHD
- Opioids numb trauma when nothing else works

Substance Use Worsens Mental Health

Substances destabilize the brain’s ability to regulate mood and thinking, leading to psychiatric symptoms.

- Alcohol worsens depression and anxiety over time
- Stimulants can trigger mania, paranoia, or psychosis
- Withdrawal creates anxiety, insomnia, and mood instability

Treating One Without the Other Doesn’t Work

When treatment ignores either condition, the untreated one undermines recovery, leading to relapse.

- Sobriety without mental health treatment leaves the underlying pain
- Medication can’t stabilize mood while substances disrupt brain chemistry
- Each relapse deepens both conditions

“Many of our clients were misdiagnosed for years. They’re treated for depression alone while manic episodes went unrecognized—or treated for addiction without doing the trauma work that’s needed. Accurate diagnosis requires time and sobriety. Once we identify and stabilize both conditions, real recovery becomes possible.”



Meghan Bohlman, LPC-S, LCDC, EMDR-Trained
Executive Clinical Director, Burning Tree Ranch

Why Dual-Diagnosis Makes Recovery Harder

Nearly half of individuals with a substance use disorder also have a mental health condition. When both are present, treatment becomes significantly more complex, and relapse is more likely without the right approach.

- 1) Symptoms Overlap and Mask Each Other**
Accurate diagnosis is difficult when depression looks like withdrawal and mania looks like intoxication.
- 2) Each Condition Reinforces the Other**
Mental health drives substance use, which in-turn can lead to psychiatric episodes. The cycle is self-reinforcing.
- 3) Standard Treatment Programs Aren't Designed for This**
Most programs treat either addiction or mental health, not both simultaneously with equal intensity.



What Families Often See

- Years of treatment attempts that ultimately end in relapse, creating a cycle
- Psychiatric diagnoses that keep changing, or medications that never seem to work
- A loved one who gets sober but remains miserable, anxious, or emotionally unstable

Why Long-Term Treatment Works for Dual-Diagnosis

Dual-diagnosis cases are complex and require time—time for substances to clear, time for accurate diagnosis, time for medication stabilization, and **time for real behavioral change**. Short-term programs cannot provide this. Burning Tree's long-term, progress-based model is built for exactly these cases.

- 1) Time Reveals the True Clinical Picture**
Accurate diagnosis of mental health conditions requires weeks or months of sustained sobriety.
- 2) Integrated Treatment Addresses Both Conditions**
Addiction and mental health are treated simultaneously by a coordinated clinical team.
- 3) Measuring Progress by Stability, Not Days**
Clients advance when they demonstrate sustained mental health stability and sobriety.



Have Other Treatment Programs Missed the Deeper Issues?

Burning Tree Ranch is the Nation's only authentic long-term treatment program for chronic relapse. Call us at (866) 287-2877 or visit us online at www.BurningTree.com.

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