



Friends and Family

roles in recovery

Friends and family play vital roles in the recovery process. People with a strong support system have a greater chance of completing treatment successfully and maintaining their sobriety at home. But helping a loved one recover from addiction isn't just a matter of providing encouragement or moral support. While your support is crucial, you are strongly encouraged to get actively involved in the healing process in the following ways:

- Attending meetings or support groups with your loved one
- Educating yourself and other family members or friends about addiction
- Working with your family one to create a stable, sober home environment
- Going to therapy sessions to learn how to communicate and set boundaries
- Addressing any of your own behaviors that may be contributing to your loved one's addiction

Addiction is rarely an isolated problem involving a single person. It's absolutely necessary that the family heal together so that each member can become healthy and strong.

Spotting the signs of addiction

Friends and family are often the first to notice the signs and symptoms of addiction. However, they may be reluctant to intervene because the reality of substance abuse is too painful. It's vitally important to respond to the signs of addiction when you notice them. Listed below are a few of the most common physical indications that a loved one has a problem with drugs or alcohol:

- Changes in appetite or body weight
- A pale or reddened complexion
- Bloodshot or watery eyes
- Pinpoint pupils
- Shakiness or tremors at certain times of day
- Poor motor coordination
- A stumbling gait
- Changes in sleeping patterns

- Needle marks or bruises on the arms
- Sweating without excessive physical activity
- Unusual body odors

Some of the most noticeable **red flags** involve changes in a loved one's moods, appearance, or behaviors:

- Isolation from friends or family
- Loss of interest in favorite activities
- Failures at school/Poor performance on the job
- Constantly borrowing (or stealing) money
- Dramatic mood swings/Depressed mood
- Anxiety and restlessness
- Uncharacteristic outbursts of anger or aggression
- Poor hygiene and grooming
- Secretive behavior
- Unusual or inappropriate clothing (sunglasses after dark, long-sleeved shirts during the day, t-shirts with alcohol logos or references to drug use)

Support vs. enabling

For many families, codependency is one of the underlying factors in addiction. Codependency is a behavioral pattern in which one member of a relationship enables another's addiction in order to gain approval, love, or power over the other.

How can you tell the difference between supporting and enabling a loved one? Here are a few key differences:

- **Underlying motives.** A supportive family member's goal is to help the loved one recover from addiction. A codependent relative unconsciously wants to keep the addict sick so that he or she relies on them for help. Supportive friends will attend meetings with their loved one, go to counseling, and refuse to accept or participate in the addictive behavior. Codependents will lie to cover up an addict's drug abuse, give them money to pay bills, or use drugs with them in order to keep them "safe" at home.
- **Level of attachment.** A supportive person may be deeply concerned about a loved one's destructive behavior, but not to the point of sacrificing his or her own self-interest. A codependent is willing to give up time, money, and endless emotional energy to "help" an addicted loved one. A codependent's sense of self-worth is so deeply intertwined with the addict that breaking the attachment can cause emotional trauma.
- **Strength of boundaries.** A supportive friend or relative is ready to help the addict, but he or she can also set boundaries against inappropriate or threatening behavior. A codependent has very weak boundaries — or no boundaries at all. A codependent will

accept verbal or physical abuse, risk her health, or expose herself to criminal charges on a loved one's behalf.

Getting a loved one to seek help

It's normal to feel scared, helpless, or overwhelmed when you're faced with the reality of an addicted loved one. How do you confront someone who seems to be intent on destroying themselves? What do you say to a partner, parent, or child you no longer recognize? In many cases, communication has already broken down by the time someone decides to take action.

You can initiate the healing process by having an honest, heart-to-heart discussion with your friend or relative. Tell them directly what you've noticed and how you feel. Let them know that you support them completely, and that you've spoken up out of love and concern. Try to avoid criticism or judgment at this point, even if your loved one has hurt you or other people you care about.

Resources for family and friends

As someone who cares deeply about an addicted individual, you've undoubtedly experienced a lot of conflicting emotions. Fear, anger, frustration, resentment, hope, grief, guilt, and anxiety are common reactions to a loved one's addiction. You can process these emotions effectively and get help for your own unresolved inner conflicts by seeking support from others. Here are a few resources to help you get started:

- **12-step groups.** The principles of 12-step support groups aren't just for addicts. These highly effective steps have been applied to help friends and family deal with the impact of addiction. Al-Anon, Alateen, Codependents Anonymous, and Families Anonymous are dedicated to helping the loved ones of addicts and alcoholics recover from the effects of addiction.
- **National Association for Children of Alcoholics (NACoA).** This non-profit organization provides educational materials and advocacy services to help the children of alcohol-dependent parents. The goal of NACoA is to ensure that the children of alcoholics get the help and support they need to grow up in a safe, healthy environment.
- **National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA).** This government agency conducts nationwide research on substance abuse and presents the results to the public in an accessible, easy-to-understand format. NIDA offers a wide range of online resources about drug abuse, substance abuse treatment, and long-term recovery.
- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).** The goals are to educate the public, track trends in substance abuse, and connect members of the public with affordable, effective treatment resources. Numerous substance abuse resources are available through the SAMHSA website.