

Substance Use Disorders: Tips for Friends and Families

Developed in collaboration with FBHPartners' Providers and the Client and Family Advisory Board

Learn about Substance Use Disorders

Many times, substance use disorders are seen as a choice or character defect instead of a chronic disease even though it affects about one in ten people and are even more common in people with other mental health disorders. Treatment can include a range of medications, counseling and support that will vary based on the needs of the individual. Learning more about addiction can help ease your feelings of anxiety or anger and help you provide your loved one with more support.

Communicate Openly

Though it may be scary, discuss your concerns about their substance use with your loved one. Let them know what specific concerns you have and that you are there to support them. Encourage them to talk with a professional and/or attend support group meetings. Having open and honest communication will help give you and your loved one clear expectations. Actively listen to your loved one and what they are saying, too. Family counseling can be a helpful start to speaking openly about your concerns.

Understand Confidentiality

Treatment programs for substance use are governed by strict confidentiality regulations. Without written consent from the client, the program is unable to discuss any information about treatment including that a person is in treatment. Do not take it personally if the staff are not able to share information with you or others about your loved one's treatment. Ask your loved one to schedule a family session if you need additional information about his or her treatment or relapse prevention plans.

Model Healthy Habits

It can be difficult, at times, to identify unhealthy habits that might be counter-productive to a loved one's recovery from a substance use disorder. Although you cannot "fix" your loved one, you can take responsibility for the behaviors you model. If you find unhealthy habits that might need to change, it can be beneficial for you to seek professional help on how to change these behaviors.

Relapse is Part of the Process

Have patience and recognize that relapse or using substances again is sometimes part of the recovery process. Talk with your loved-one about their relapse prevention plan and what you can do to support it. The focus should be on starting recovery again, rather than on the relapse itself. Develop your own plan about how you will take care of yourself and your family and support your loved one in the event of a relapse.

Help Build a Support Network

Family, friends, and significant others play an important role in the recovery of a loved one with a substance use disorder. These are people your loved one can turn to in moments of crisis or confusion. Lasting recovery is more likely when an individual has a variety of supporters rather than just a few. It is not healthy for either of you if you are the only source of support.

Attend Family Counseling Together

Meeting with a professional together can enhance the family relationship and look at the family relationships as a system instead of many separate parts. Family counseling will give you an opportunity to ask questions about the treatment process, your loved-one's relapse prevention plan and develop communication skills that promote long-term recovery.

Encourage Continuing Care and Support

Follow-up care increases the overall effectiveness of treatment. Continuing care can include group counseling or support and often extends for a year or more after treatment.

Take Care of Yourself

Many groups exist that provide support to those who have a loved one with a substance use disorder. Obtaining support can help you deal with the confusion and pain, while obtaining more information. You can also gain support from others who are dealing with similar circumstances. A variety of professional and peer supports are available for family members. For more information *see Resources below*.

Co-Dependency and Enabling

Often times, people who know someone with a substance use disorder create coping mechanisms to help them deal with challenges and frustration. The coping skills may enable the loved one to continue using substances. Create new coping strategies that do not enable the person's substance use. Many family support groups can help identify possible strategies with you.

Resources

Al-Anon: <http://www.al-anon.org/>

Nar-Anon: <http://www.nar-anon.org/>

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA): <http://www.drugabuse.gov/patients-families>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA): <http://www.samhsa.gov/atod>

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. (NCADD): <https://ncadd.org/for-friends-and-family/helping-someone>

Partnership for Drug-Free Kids: www.drugfree.org/want-help-adult-family-member-friend-drug-alcohol-problem-7-suggestions/