



UNITED
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Life Balance

Healthy matters to keep in mind.

September 2011

The Road to Recovery

Helping a Loved One Deal with a Substance Abuse Disorder

When a loved one has a substance abuse problem, it can be frightening. The problems created aren't limited to the person using the drugs or alcohol. It's difficult for family members and friends to know how to help.

You can support your loved one to seek appropriate treatment and make a recovery. Equally important is taking care of yourself. Get help if you feel that your life is out of balance or if you notice that caring for the person is taking control of your life.

Helping a Loved One in Recovery

- Learn about substance abuse and its treatment.
- Find out how substance abuse affects the family.

- Encourage your loved one to talk with you or with a counselor, or to find other outlets to express feelings.
- Help your loved one avoid people, places or activities that may trigger their urge to use the substance. Some triggers are difficult to avoid, such as a spouse who uses. Support your loved one to face these challenges and make changes.
- Help your loved one find and stick to scheduled activities, especially during times when the substance use may have occurred, such as in the evening after work.

Interventions

Many people who abuse substances deny that they

have a problem. Through an intervention, family and friends can gather and help them recognize the impact of their use on themselves and others. They present the reality of the abuse in a non-judgmental and caring way, to try to break down any denial that may be keeping the person from seeking treatment.¹ Having a substance-abuse professional involved helps the family prepare for appropriate treatment after a successful intervention.

Helping a loved one recover from substance abuse is often challenging. But you don't have to go it alone. UBH is here to help. Call or log on any time for help with any of life's challenges (see Resources).

Are You Worried About a Coworker?

Signs that a co-worker may have a substance abuse problem include:

- Being frequently late to work or absent
- Not completing work correctly or on time
- Not paying attention
- Forgetting things
- Asking co-workers to cover for poor work and absenteeism
- Feeling tired constantly

Don't cover up behaviors that may be resulting from substance abuse. Also don't let a co-worker put your health or safety in danger. If a co-worker threatens your safety, tell your supervisor immediately. If you see a co-worker get high or deal drugs on the job, tell a supervisor as soon as you can. If a co-worker asks you for help, refer him or her to SEAP.

SEAP

Call toll-free
(800) 692-7459
(800) 824-4306 TDD
or log on to
www.liveandworkwell.com
access code: Pennsylvania

Avoiding Unhealthy Codependency

When you're concerned about a loved one's substance abuse problem, you can play an important role in recovery. However, if you treat the user's needs as more important than your own, this is known as "codependency" or "coaddiction." This can put you in an unhealthy situation.

It starts when you try to fix the problem, seemingly a good idea, but your attempts don't help.² Then you try harder by doing the same things more often and more intensely, without the situation improving. You feel anger, frustration, anxiety or guilt. You may also begin to suffer from mental health and even physical problems as a result of being chronically stressed.

To avoid coaddiction or to overcome it, you need to accept your powerlessness over the addiction, understand that you can't control it, and detach from the symptoms of your loved one's addiction.²

Healthy Tips for Helping Your Loved One

- Set limits on your relationship; for example, refuse to spend time with

your loved one when he or she is under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

- Don't help in any way that might promote or continue the abuse. For example, don't make excuses for your loved one's behavior while under the influence, or lend money that might go toward drugs or alcohol.
- Voice your concerns the day after a binge or high. Describe your feelings, "I care about you and I'm worried about how drugs and alcohol are affecting you." Do NOT call your loved one an alcoholic or an addict.
- Let them know you're available when they're ready to get help. It's not your fault if you can't get through to them. Back off and let them have space

to recognize they need help on their own; never give up hope during those times.

- Encourage your loved one to speak with a mental health or substance abuse professional. Talk to the professional yourself about how to stay supportive when the person is resistant to seeking help.

Consider Support Groups

AlAnon, Families Anonymous and other groups can help you cope with a loved one's substance abuse and avoid codependency. Typically these groups consist of relatives and friends of substance abusers who share their experiences to help each other overcome common problems. There

are no dues or fees, and the meetings are kept confidential. Contact us to find a support group near you.



Resources

United Behavioral Health

www.liveandworkwell.com

- Visit the "Alcohol & Drug Abuse/Dependence" Mental Health Condition Centers for strategies and resources to assist your loved ones, including children and adolescents.

The information, advice, treatments and therapeutic approaches in this article are provided for educational purposes only and are not meant to be used in place of professional clinical consultations for individual health needs. Certain treatments may not be covered under your benefit plan. Check your health plan regarding your coverage of services. UBH does not recommend or endorse any treatment, medication, or suggested approach, specific or otherwise. Consult with your clinician, physician or mental health care provider for specific health care needs, treatment or medications.

¹ Johnson, Vernon E. *Intervention*. City Center, MN: Hazelden Foundation. 1986.

² Gorski, Terence and Merlene Miller. *Staying Sober: A Guide for Relapse Prevention*. Independence, MO: Herald House/Independence Press. 1986.