

## How Can I Help Someone with an Addiction?

The challenge with addiction is that the addict is not the only one impacted by this disease. Family and friends can have difficulty with the addict's behavior, financial problems, legal problems and the daily struggle of supporting a loved one. Here are some ways that family and friends can support an addicted family member or friend.

**Educate Yourself:** Get information about addictions. Understand the addict's disease process. Find information about how it impacts the family and friends. Knowledge is power and it may help you understand more about yourself and your loved one. There are many resources for finding this information: SAMHSA.gov (Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration) has all types of educational and information resources. The public library and the internet have an enormous amount of information for education, groups, support, treatment, etc.

**Get Support:** When you have a loved one with an addiction problem, it can create a great deal of difficulty in your life. There are groups that can help you learn how to cope, provide resources and help the addict. Al-Anon (focused on Alcohol addiction) and Nar-Anon (focused on drug addiction – prescription and illegal) are two of those groups.

**Get Counseling:** It may be helpful to get some individual counseling to assist yourself. Counseling isn't just for the addict. The more you are able to manage the better you will be able to help your loved one. There are a variety of resources to find counselors. Your company may have an Employee Assistance Program such as CONCERN Services. Your insurance may have mental health benefits that you can access and a list of "get off the rollercoaster", the more you will be able to set limits and boundaries with the addict.

**Seek specialty help:** If you need assistance with financial issues or legal issues it may be helpful to talk to an attorney providers that are covered. There are organizations that provide services on a sliding scale fee and you can often find those by calling your local Mental Health Agency or United Way. Local churches may also provide some low or no cost counseling.

**Don't Enable:** It is difficult for family members when the disease takes hold. Often family members have supported the person's addiction without even fully realizing that was what they were doing. Don't rescue the addict. Let them experience the consequences of their disease. Often people are unable to change until they are forced. Don't financially support the addict or their addiction. Many family members and friends buy groceries, give financial assistance to pay court fines or attorneys or pay rent to help someone out but usually it only prolongs the disease as addicts are able to avoid consequences.

**Have Realistic Expectations:** Don't preach or lecture to the addict. They are usually unable to hear what you are saying. Continue to hold them accountable to expectations and offer help to direct them to the treatment they need. Don't expect addicts to keep promises, they are not able to do so while in the process of their disease. Don't react with pity or anger. This only keeps you in the process with the addict. The more you can or financial specialist. Some Employee Assistance Programs such as CONCERN Services will offer a free, initial consultation and may be able to connect you with the right person. You can also contact Legal Aid programs in your area to see if you qualify for those services or they may be able to direct you to someone who can assist you.

**Take Care of Yourself:** Focusing on your own life is the most important thing you can do to assist the addict. If you are stressed out due to their issues in addition to your own, it creates resentment and strain. It makes it difficult to want to help someone who has created so much difficulty in your life. By taking care of yourself through exercise, sleep, socializing and getting support, you may be more able to help your loved one when they are ready to accept the help.

The most important thing to remember is that you aren't alone. Many people battle with these issues every day and it is vital to get the resources and support you need!

