

Tips for Family & Friends:

If someone you love has an addiction, you may feel overwhelmed or “stuck” in terms of what you can do to help them. These tips are intended as a starting point to give you some options & ideas. Ultimately, you will be the best judge of what may or may not work for your particular situation.

- **Learn as much as you can** about addiction. The internet, library, book stores and support groups are great resources.
- **Don't rescue the addict.** Hold them accountable by allowing them to experience the consequences of their disease. Addicts are more likely to seek help when things are NOT going well.
- **Don't financially support the addict/addiction.** Chances are very good that your money is being spent on the addiction. If you offer to help support the addict's recovery, make payments directly to the treatment center.
- **Don't analyze a loved one's addictive behaviors.** There are no underlying causes. Addiction is a disease. Looking for underlying causes is a waste of time and energy and usually ends up with some type of blame focused on the family or others. This “paralysis by analysis” is a common manipulation by the disease of addiction which distracts everyone from the important issue of the illness itself.
- **Do set realistic boundaries with the goal of keeping the family safe.** If the addict's behavior is posing a threat to the family, then choices will need to be made regarding how to keep the family safe. This may include not allowing drugs or drug paraphernalia in the home, not allowing minor children to ride in a vehicle with someone who has been using and/or finding alternative living arrangements. If there is a high degree of volatility, you should be prepared to leave or call law enforcement.
- **Avoid pity and anger.** These emotions are like a roller-coaster ride for everyone involved. When you get angry with the addict, you may make threats that are not well thought out, and then backtrack once your anger has subsided and is replaced by feeling sorry for the addict.
- **Refocus your energy.** You didn't cause the disease, you cannot control the disease and you cannot cure the disease or take on the work of someone else's recovery. It is not your job to pick up the pieces when things go wrong or to cover up their mistakes. Focus your energy on your own wellbeing.



How to Address Your Concerns:

- **Timing is everything.** Aim for a time when the person is not under the influence.
- **Use “I” statements.** Saying “I noticed,” “I feel,” or “I'm worried,” are more helpful in conveying your concerns without being judgmental.
- **Stay calm.** Be prepared to stay calm, even if your loved one is getting agitated.
- **Be specific when you talk.** Instead of “You never keep your word,” try “You didn't show up at Junior's game last night. He was expecting you.”
- **Point out the impact of the substance use on something that matters to the addict.** Instead of “Don't you even care about yourself?” try “You love your kids so much, what was it like for all of you when you had to go to jail for those pills?”
- **Don't make idle threats.** If you decide to set an ultimatum, say what you mean and mean what you say.
- **Don't force promises.** Addicts are unlikely to keep promises. This leads to disappointment, lies and anger.
- **Don't preach or lecture.** Chances are, they have heard it all before and it will not impact them. If an addict could be “talked into” sobriety, many more people would get sober.
- **Set realistic expectations.** Some addicts are secretly hoping that someone will talk to them and help them, but many others don't see the problem and will react defensively to any discussion about their using. This is not personal, it is the nature of the disease.
- **Be positive in your support.** Criticism and judgement aren't helpful, especially coming from a trusted friend or family member.
- **Remember that addiction is a disease.** The behaviors might be bad, but the person isn't. They are suffering from a disease that allows hurtful behaviors to happen. Remember that you are talking to them because you care about them, not to make them “get their life together.” Use the same tone and approach you'd use if you thought someone you loved was showing signs of diabetes or high blood pressure.