

Supporting a Loved One in Recovery

Substance abuse not only affects the abuser, but also loved ones of the abuser. Recovery is a delicate process. If you know someone who is recovering from substance dependence, there are some things you can do to help. There are also some things you should avoid. Following are ways to help you help your loved one in recovery.¹

1. Don't view your loved one's addiction as a family disgrace. A person recovering from an addiction should be treated the same as someone recovering from another illness.
2. Don't nag or lecture to your loved one. Chances are he has already told himself everything you are saying. He will only take so much and then shut out the rest. You may only increase his need to lie or make promises that cannot be kept.
3. Don't use the "if you loved me" appeal. Since the addict or alcoholic is compulsive and cannot be controlled by willpower, this approach only increases guilt. It is like saying, "If you loved me, you wouldn't have cancer."
4. Avoid any ultimatums unless you have thought them through carefully and definitely intend to carry them out. There may be times, of course, when a specific action is necessary to protect children. Idle threats only prove to the addict or alcoholic that you don't mean what you say.
5. Don't hide the drugs or alcohol or dispose of it. Usually this only pushes the addict or alcoholic into a state of desperation. In the end she will simply find new ways of getting more drugs or alcohol. Instead, insist that she get help immediately for her relapse.
6. Don't let the addict or alcoholic persuade you to use drugs or drink with him on the grounds that it will help him cut back. It rarely does and is a form of enabling.
7. Don't be jealous of the recovery method your loved one chooses. The tendency is to think that love of home and family is enough incentive for recovery, so you may feel left out when your loved one turns to other people for help in staying sober. If your loved one needed medical attention, you wouldn't be jealous of the doctor, would you?
8. Don't expect an immediate 100 percent recovery. As with any illness, there is a period of convalescence. There may be relapses and times of tension and resentment.
9. Don't try to protect the recovering person from using or drinking situations. It's one of the quickest ways to push someone into relapse. A person in recovery must learn on her own how to say "no" gracefully. If you warn people against serving her drinks, you will stir up old feelings of resentment and inadequacy.
10. Do offer love, support and understanding throughout your loved one's recovery.

Your Magellan Program is an Important Resource

Log on to www.MagellanHealth.com/member or call your program's toll-free number 800-523-5668 to access information, articles, resources and tools. Your program provides expert help and support for individuals and families recovering from drug or alcohol abuse.

¹ Dual Diagnosis: Substance Abuse and Mental Illness, Copyright 1993, National Alliance for Mentally Ill
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