

Drug & alcohol treatment: a brief guide for supporters

Supporting a friend, relative or partner who is having treatment to help with a drug or alcohol problem can be tough – even though you may want them to do it. It can help if you know what to expect.

There are a few basic things it's important to think about to reduce the stress of drug and alcohol treatment for everybody:

- **How much do you know** about drug and alcohol treatment? You need to be informed about what is happening.
- **Does your friend, relative or partner want you to be involved** in their treatment? If not, you'll need to find other ways of supporting them.
- **What will it cost you to offer support?** How much time/ energy/money can you realistically devote to being involved/ supporting them?
- **What support is available** for YOU and are you willing to let others help?

What does 'treatment' actually mean?

Drug and alcohol treatment can be delivered in a variety of ways but it ALWAYS starts with an assessment of what your friend, relative or partner needs. Once an assessment has been done, a suitable form of treatment (a care plan) is agreed with your friend, relative or partner. Treatment can include 1:1 counselling, attendance at a day programme, medication to help stabilise or detox (either at home or as an in-patient).

Sometimes, treatment can be designed to help someone use drugs or alcohol in a less harmful way, rather than stopping altogether.

How can I help?

There are a number of things you can do to support someone in treatment:

- **Find out what the treatment involves** and how it's likely to affect your friend, relative or partner. Come and see us at the network or call us.
- **Ask the person if they would like you to be involved.** A treatment service cannot involve you unless your friend, relative or partner gives consent.
- **Be clear about what you can and can't do.** If you over commit you won't be helping in the long run.
- **Make sure you have some support for yourself.** There will be times when it'll be tough. Come and see us, let's talk it through.

The way you might be affected

Remember that it is the treatment needs of your friend, relative or partner that are being addressed, not your wishes. It can be easy to feel:

- **Unsure** about what to do or say to help.
- **Frustrated and hurt** that you are not involved – or worried about the impact if you are.
- That you are being **blamed** for the problem.
- **Afraid** that the treatment isn't working.
- **Upset** by the person's behaviour or distress.
- **Worried** about the effects on the rest of the family.
- **Concerned** about what happens if the treatment doesn't work – or when it comes to an end.

Some questions frequently asked by supporters

Q: Will I have to pay for support?

A: No, all support is free.

Q: Who will know my business if I seek support?

A: All groups and services have a confidentiality policy. It usually states that all information shared will be kept confidential except in certain circumstances. You can ask to have these explained if you have any concerns.

Q: How long can I get support from the Drug & Alcohol team?

A: As long as you feel in need of it. Because your needs may change over time, so can the sort of support you receive from the Network.

Q: Will the person I care about ever get better?

A: In most cases, things do improve – however slowly, so you should never give up hope.

Q: What if things go wrong again?

A: Recovery is a difficult process for everyone and there will probably be ups and downs along the way. Try to keep focussed on the long term goals by getting support to deal with now.

What sort of things can I do to support myself?

There are lots of things you can do to ease the situation for yourself. Here are some suggestions:

- **Don't bottle things up**, find someone to talk to.
- **Stay in touch** with other family and friends.
- **Ask questions** – as many as you need to.

- **See your GP** if you find it hard to sleep, or start to feel too anxious and/or depressed.
- **Let other people help.** Family and friends will probably want to but, if you prefer, there are drop-in groups and support groups where you can talk to other people who may share your concerns or answer your questions. Call us or check out the website below.
- **Make time for yourself.** It's easy to forget YOU.