



Addiction Treatment for Your Loved One:
A HOW-TO GUIDE





Drug and alcohol addiction is a serious problem in this country.

Nearly 10% of people in America are victims of this insidious disease. Of that 10%, alcohol is the primary culprit, with an overwhelming 7 out of 10 people abusing it. Prescription painkillers and illicit drugs are also a contender for major concern. It's hardly an exaggeration to state that the epidemic of drug and alcohol abuse exacerbates as each year passes.

Unfortunately, these percentages don't address the consequences and damage done to the victims' loved ones. Often, their relationships become compromised, finances suffer, and their work performance declines. A person struggling with the disease of addiction may be totally oblivious to their wake of destruction and is often perplexed by the damage it has caused to their friends and family. People who struggle with substance abuse may be in denial that there even is a problem. Suffering family members or close friends see the problem quite clearly but often feel powerless in addressing it. For family and friends, the question that must be answered is, "How can I talk to my loved one about addiction?"



What Are the Signs of Addiction?

Before starting the conversation with your loved one, you should understand some of the signs and symptoms that may indicate whether treatment is needed. Getting help for a loved one's addiction can only happen when it has been determined that a substance abuse problem does, in fact, exist. Medical science has made great progress in identifying the genes that factor into addiction tendencies. However, no biological markers can definitively indicate the disease in a person. While it is easy to identify someone with a heart problem, or diabetes, identifying addiction is not so clear-cut. Blood and urine testing is useful but behavioral symptoms must be factored in as well.

In spite of the very real threat of physical or social consequences, those who struggle will compulsively continue to use.

Loved ones must closely observe for any signs that indicate excessive use and symptoms of dependence, including:

- Requiring increasingly larger amounts of a substance to get high or drunk
- Continuing abuse of substances, even if it affects the health and well-being of themselves or others
- Multiple failed attempts at curbing or eliminating a substance
- Using substances becomes more important than personal and professional responsibilities
- Excessive time or money spent procuring substances
- A pronounced and overwhelming "craving" or "need" for substances
- Attempts to reduce intake of substances provokes strong withdrawal symptoms
- When questioned about substance use, users quickly become extremely defensive
- Substance abusers are quick to blame others for their own drug or alcohol addiction



**FACT: 1 IN 6
PEOPLE WHO STRUGGLE
WITH ADDICTION
2 SUBSTANCES
(OR MORE)**

Multiple Addictions

If 1 in 6 of people who struggle with addiction are abusing two or more substances, warning signs and symptoms are bound to overlap. Loved ones must recognize the fact that a family member who is addicted to alcohol is likely abusing other substances as well.

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism reported that a study of 248 individuals with an alcohol addiction stood a 6 in 10 chance of also developing a drug abuse disorder. For this reason, loved ones and friends must do whatever it takes to uncover addiction and seek treatment solutions before tragic results take place.

Addiction and Denial

To make matters more difficult for loved ones, substance abusers are careful to hide their addiction. The stigma that surrounds addiction is powerful incentive for users to conceal their dependence at all costs. Those suffering from addiction rarely think that it can happen to them, which only adds to their sense of shame. In fact, people from all walks of life could be concealing an addiction.

Research by The National Survey on Drug Use and Health indicates how far alcohol and drug use behavior stretches across all populations. In 2012, 22% of college students aged 18–22 used illicit drugs. While this statistic may not be surprising, other statistics are. For example, nearly 8.9% of full-time workers abused drugs in the same year. Outside of the labor force, 6% of people like homemakers and retirees abused illicit drugs. It is these alarming figures that loved ones and friends must keep in mind. Any signs of addiction must be addressed, not ignored. Early interventions, such as screenings and evaluations completed by a professional, can make all the difference in preventing full blown addiction.



A recent Time Magazine article observed that individuals who struggle with addiction rebel against angry confrontations or strict ultimatums. Gentle techniques and encouragement work far better.

Starting the Conversation about Addiction with Loved Ones

Now that you know what to look for when dealing with loved ones, you may need to have a serious conversation with them. Preparing for the conversation is critical for getting loved ones the help they need.

A Calm, Measured Approach Works Best

How you confront loved ones about their addiction will definitely affect the outcome. A recent Time magazine article observed that individuals who struggle with addiction rebel against angry confrontations or strict ultimatums. Gentle techniques and encouragement work far better.

When confronting a loved one, you need to accomplish two critical objectives:

- Get them to admit to their addiction
- Convince them that treatment is necessary

Persuasion from the Outside Can Be Effective

Many people hesitate to confront loved ones, fearing that it won't be effective. In fact, it is the actions of loved ones that get many people into addiction treatment who would otherwise be reluctant to go, thereby decreasing their risk of overdose or even death.

According to a study from the National Institutes of Health, outside pressure is a significant contributor to getting patients into drug rehab treatment. Sometimes external motivators can be helpful in ushering your loved one into treatment. In fact, few patients in drug rehab engaged in treatment because it was their idea alone to get help. Instead, nearly all those suffering from the disease addiction were gently pressed by loved ones, coworkers, and even the courts to get treatment for their drug and alcohol behavior.



Honest Conversation Makes a Difference

Having a Heart-to-Heart with a Loved One

Addiction is a disease of denial. When people are in active addiction, their brains are signaling that nothing is wrong. That's why it's so difficult to get active substance users into treatment. However, despite the difficulty involved, there are viable solutions.

No matter where someone is on the addiction spectrum, an honest, heart-felt discussion can be instrumental in getting the individual motivated to accept rehab treatment. However, this conversation may have to be a more organized, formal intervention because it may require the input from friends, additional family members, colleagues from the workplace, or others who may be influential, such as a priest, minister, or rabbi. If the person in active addiction holds these people in high esteem, what they have to say can matter a great deal.

Although conducting an intervention by yourself can be successful, it is often better to let an addiction counselor handle it. These trained individuals possess a quality you don't—the ability to be completely impartial. If the discussion becomes heated (which often happens), having a calm, unbiased individual who is able to see things objectively can defuse the situation.

Prepare Carefully and Thoroughly

Carefully planning your conversation will make all the difference between success and failure. Make sure to incorporate the following:

- A neutral environment
- Stating the purpose of the intervention
- Providing adequate support from people expressing their concerns
- An equal opportunity for everyone to speak
- Documentation of any critical points from the conversation
- Discussion of all viable treatment options



What Does Treatment Involve?

There are generally two treatment options available for drug rehab treatment: drug therapy and behavioral-based therapy. Which is the best option? The National Institute on Drug Abuse states the most effective treatment does more than just treat the symptoms. Their research indicates that the best treatment option is the one that can meet the unique needs of each individual suffering from addiction. A full holistic approach that addresses the body, mind, and spirit has proven to be the most successful in sustaining a long-term recovery.

Behavioral Therapy: An Integral Aspect of Holistic Treatment

Treatment should include evidence-based therapy practices that help addiction sufferers to replace harmful behaviors with healthy, productive behaviors. This is the very heart of behavioral therapy.

Addiction cannot be “cured.” It can only be treated.

In behavioral therapy, the focus is on why someone needs to use alcohol or other drugs. Working with a licensed professional counselor, independently or in a group setting, can help active users with two objectives:

- Understand the reasons behind their substance use
- Learning how to adopt healthy coping skills that support their new recovery lifestyle

You may hear terms like cognitive behavioral therapy, ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy) and DBT (Dialectical Behavior Therapy), all of which are effective in treating the addicted brain and helping people struggling with substance use understand why it's important to change their behavior.



Gathering Support & Self-Care

Supporting the Support System for Those Dealing with Addiction

Clearly, someone struggling with an addiction needs solid support systems. However, friends and family members need support as well. Drug and alcohol addiction can devastate more than the active user. Stresses and strains can be formidable for family and friends as well. Left unresolved, loved ones could face just as many problems as the the ones who they are supposed to help.

For that reason, it is essential to take care of yourself. One way to do this is by engaging in active Al-anon. This community of support can help provide you with the answers you need, the safety that you are not alone, and the opportunity to do your own recovery work.

Professional family therapists can also be helpful in offering one-on-one counseling to help you understand that addiction is a family disease. Trust, boundaries and communication have all been affected. Taking a proactive approach to your recovery by taking care of yourself will make it easier for you to cope with a sometimes burdensome situation. These therapies help by educating you about the complexity of addiction and the issues that stem from it. The discussions that take place will make it more feasible to talk to loved ones with an addiction in a way that is both constructive and supportive.

Addiction Recovery: The Battle Doesn't End With Treatment

Supporting Recovery: What Can Loved Ones Do?

Even though your loved one successfully completes treatment and is working a solid recovery program, the journey is not over. In reality, sobriety is a lifelong process that requires focus and dedication for everyone. Fortunately, over time, it gets easier for those in recovery and their families. Continuing to apply good boundaries, avoiding enabling behavior, and surrounding



yourself in a healthy Al-anon community makes the recovery process more manageable for all involved.

It is important for family members of those recovering from addiction to create a sober environment in and out of the home. When alcohol, prescription painkillers, or illicit drugs are present in the house, this could be an overwhelming temptation to someone trying to recover. Removing the temptations, particularly in early recovery can greatly lessen the chance of relapse. Lock up prescription drugs and keep alcohol out of the house—or at least keep it out of sight.

Do Whatever You Can To Prevent Relapse

When in recovery from addiction, there is always potential for a relapse, whether it's two months after treatment or two decades. Even individuals strongly committed to recovery can falter when faced with life's difficulties and traumatic events. Get help right away if you notice your loved one showing signs that could cause relapse such as:

- Professional and personal stress
- Destructive relationships
- Negative life events
- Opportunities that present temptation

Encourage loved ones to get the proper help they need. Supporting your loved ones and encouraging them to get the help they need before relapse is crucial to their sobriety.

Visit LakeviewHealth.com if you're interested in learning more about addiction treatment options and caring for loved ones who have been dealing with addiction issues.