

**A pocket guide for family
members living with
someone's alcohol and
drug use or gambling**



Much of the content in this guide is based on AFINet's work on reaching family members and the 5-Step Method, an evidence-based intervention for family members being delivered around the world and Steps to Cope, a young people's version of the 5-Step Method (see references).

While it has mainly a UK focus, its messages may be helpful to family members in other parts of the world.

Thoughts on resilience, those strengths that help people in difficult situations were taken from a self-help booklet for family members called Taking the Lid Off, developed in the South Eastern HSC Trust.

Other types of support such as self-help groups like Al-Anon are mentioned in the back of this guide.

We believe two things:

- Where there is problematic alcohol and drug use or gambling, in no way are family members to blame for what is happening in their family
- Family members have needs in their own right.

We use the words “substance misuse” which can range from excessive use, to problem use, to addiction to alcohol or any other drugs. This guide can also be used for problem gambling.

We do hope you find it helpful.

Getting started

When someone has a problem with alcohol, other drugs, or gambling, it affects everyone around them. The people most affected are those closest to that person.

Considering how common alcohol and other drug problems are, you can be sure that you are not alone.

The World Health Organisation estimates there may be at least 100 million people worldwide who may be affected by someone's alcohol or drug use. Gambling would put that figure higher.

Why has this guide been produced? Worldwide there is a lack of consistent support for family members in their own right.

This guide has been produced with evidence-based information, ideas for support for family members and most importantly, hope.

Family members are people caught in highly stressful situations that can have an effect on them.

What is that effect and more importantly what can help?

The experience of family members

Extreme stress and dilemmas of how to cope are common experiences for family members.

You can get so used to what is going on you see it as “acceptable” and do not realise the impact it is having on you.

So many family members experience:

- A partner/spouse/parent /brother/sister who is physically or emotionally unavailable because of their drinking or drug taking
- Financial pressures
- Taking on caretaking roles
- Exhaustion and resentment
- Trying to protect the loved one or hide the problem
- Verbal or physical abuse
- Watching someone they love physically and psychologically deteriorate over many years
- Always expecting the ‘unexpected’ leaving you drained
- Leaving the family home due to concerns over personal and children’s safety.

For the children of the family, the problems may follow them through their childhood, into their teenage years and may be with them for much of their adult lives.

Can you see any of these in your family?

Common myths families can believe:

- If we do not talk about it, it does not exist
- I do not need help, they do
- It is my fault
- It will all be okay if they cut down or stop
- If we keep doing what we are doing, even if it does not really help, somehow things will get better
- It can seem just “normal”. This is the way things are. People begin to accept what is not acceptable.

There is no right or wrong way to respond to this extremely stressful situation. There is no rule book.

What we would like you to consider is what would work best for you.

With support, many family members say that they felt less guilty about what was going on as they realised that the problems were not their fault and that they could not change their relatives and their behaviour.

‘I can’t solve the problem; I’ve got to stand back and look after me’.

Safety first

Domestic abuse can escalate when alcohol or other drugs are misused. If you are worried that you or someone in your family is experiencing any violence, it is important that you know how to maximise your safety.



Make sure you have a back-up plan for crises; someone you can turn to who you trust. Know the Domestic Abuse Services in your area.

It is important you are prepared for an emergency in case you ever find yourself in an uncomfortable situation. Some ideas include:

1. Make sure you know how to contact emergency services.
2. Keep a little bit of money aside in case you have to make an urgent phone call or if you have a mobile phone, make sure you always have it charged.
3. Make a list of people you can call. Try to memorise their phone numbers so that you can contact them in an emergency.
4. Speak to someone you trust about your situation. This could be a good friend or a professional.

To start, some practical things to help

Small steps get you started. Put together, they can carry you a long way.

Caring for yourself

You may be used to putting your needs second to the needs of the person using alcohol or drugs. You may have been doing this for a long time. Self care is a way to value and look after yourself.

There are countless ways to look after yourself. You decide what would work for you. One way of looking after yourself used in the UK and other parts of the world is the “**5 Ways to Wellbeing**”, an evidence-based approach for improving well-being.

The NHS Choices website has some guidance on that.

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/Pages/improve-mental-wellbeing.aspx>

Recognising it is not your fault

Many family members carry feelings of guilt and self-blame for the person’s drinking, drug taking or gambling. Often, they think “If I could just do X or Y things will change”. Family members should not shoulder the blame for another person’s behaviour.

Getting support

Building your own support is also important. Have people or activities that work for you.

To quote common advice often given to family members:

You didn't cause it. You cannot cure it.

You can't control it But.....

You can take better care of yourself. This can help you and may influence others around you in a positive way.

What is living with this like for you?

Family members so often say they feel:

confused and embarrassed

worried, angry, or frightened

alone, guilty or to blame

Thinking about the problems that can come with living with alcohol, drug problems or gambling in the family may be upsetting and can lead to strong unpleasant and uncomfortable feelings.

These feelings are neither right nor wrong. They are normal.

It is what we do with these feelings that are important so looking at how it affects you can be a good beginning.

So, what is it really like to live with someone with these problems? Here is what some people have said:

"She is so restless at night."

"She can be irritable and moody."

"Dad is so foolish and embarrassing."

"He spoils special occasions."

"Dad can go missing."

"We don't talk like we used to."

"Things are unpredictable."

"He can be threatening and violent."

The purpose of this first step is to think about your concerns and fears. How does it affect you and other people in your family?

So how does this affect you?

Think about how the other person's drinking, drug taking, or gambling affects you:

- Your feelings
- Your physical health
- Your mood and mental health
- Your work
- Your family life
- Your sleeping/appetite.

Talking this over with someone you trust and who will listen is a good start.

What else people have found helpful is:

- **Getting information that helps**
- **Exploring the ways they cope**
- **Exploring the support they use.**

**What information do you need or will find helpful?
Knowledge is power. Relevant information can reduce stress.**

Knowing and understanding more about alcohol or drug problems or gambling can reduce stress for many people.

What people have said they wanted to know:

- What is addiction?
- Why do people keep using drugs or drinking despite the harm they are causing?
- How common is addiction?
- Does drinking and drug taking affect mental health?
- More information about different drugs.

Is there other information you think would be useful for you?

While it will not be possible to include a wide range of information here, where can people find good information?



Internet

Health providers

Libraries

Some sources of information we can include here:

- Self-help material like Taking the Lid Off
- <https://covidwellbeingni.info/assets/pdfs/resources/drugs/Taking%20the%20Lid%20Off%20low-Res.pdf>
- For young people: www.stepstocope.co.uk
- Other sources of information from around the world are at the back of this booklet.

How do you tend to cope or respond?

Coping with extreme stress, let alone the chronic stress that comes with someone's excessive drinking, drug taking, or gambling, can be challenging.



Coping can mean different things to different people. What we see as coping is anything you do or feel in response to what is going on around you.

There are no rules about how to cope with this. Because you have had to work it out on your own, it is trial and error.

- The way you cope may be helpful for you
- On the other hand, it may just help you survive a really difficult situation
- It is often unhelpful if it makes you feel guilty or worried
- There is no right or wrong here. Just what helps you?

There is no right or wrong way of coping. There is no rule book. How to respond can be a major dilemma for family members. The purpose of this is to help to choose ways that work for you.

Research into the styles of coping families use

In conversations with family members in different parts of the world, patterns or styles of coping were seen. These were:

Putting up with it

- Being lenient, accepting and self sacrificing: ie. cleaning up messes, fixing problems the drinker/drug user caused
- Shielding the person from the harm they do themselves.

Trying to regain control

- Trying to change the drinker/drug user and their behaviour
- Trying to control their drinking or drug use
- Taking charge of the family.

Withdrawing or gaining independence

- Putting some emotional/physical distance between themselves and the drinker/drug user or person gambling
- Avoiding, escaping
- Not worrying
- Being independent and doing something for themselves.

Each of these ways of coping can have a positive and an unhelpful side. Look at sacrificing and compromising. Arguments are avoided and stress reduced, yet at the same time the family member can feel being taken advantage of or the drinker/drug taker does not take responsibility.

Do you find yourself using any of the above ways to “cope”?

Do these ways really work for you?

What is both good and unhelpful about them?

Are there other ways you could respond?

How do you feel about some of the things you tend to do to cope?

There is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ way of responding though some may be affecting your health more than others.

Many people find they tend to respond in the same way all the time, while others respond in different ways at different times.

Conflict can arise in families when people take on quite different ways of responding.

There may be some situations when you feel that you could try a different approach and this guide can help you to think about what you could do differently.

When weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of how you respond, and whether there is anything you could change, it is important that you consider your own safety and well-being, and that of others in the family.

“It helped me see with different eyes. It helped me start my coping journey. Thank you so much...”

What social support do you have?

What does the word “support” mean to you?

There are many kinds of support people have said they find useful.

Helps you feel safe.

Helps you feel good about yourself.

Accepts how you feel with no criticism.

Helps you have fun.

Gives you practical support.

Helps you get involved with things like hobbies, being physically active or wellbeing activities like mindfulness or yoga.

Helps you keep things going day to day.

Helps you feel listened to and understood.

Who are the important people in your life you feel able to talk to or ask for help from?

Make a list of people or activities that are supportive and in what way.

Are there people who are not supportive?

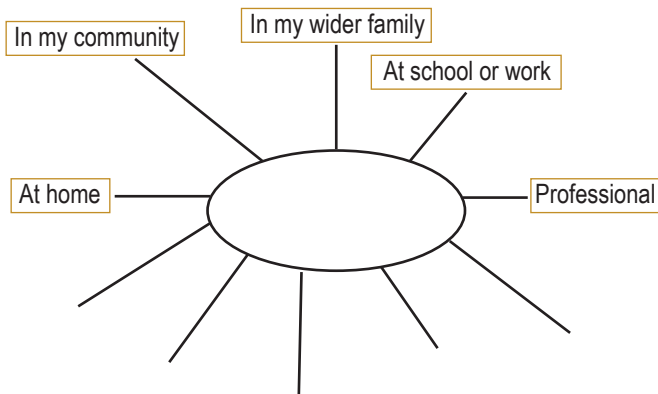


The purpose of this is to help you look at the support you have. Family members often have a lot more support than they realise.

Drawing out your support can be helpful.

Take a piece of paper. Put yourself in the centre circle.

As you draw each circle, write the name of the person in it. Draw circles of those you consider most supportive nearest to you and people less supportive further away from you. Give examples of how they are supportive. Add more lines if you need to. Who could you add for support?



Strengthening Your Resilience

As has been said, so many family members find the stress and strain from someone's drinking or drug taking a significant challenge to live with.

It helps to be more resilient.

A key factor in people being more resilient is the feeling that they have choices and control in their lives.

While we cannot control another person's drinking or drug use, we can control what we think and our responses.

Resilience is the ability to “bounce back” from adversity. Research into resilience has looked at what helps people to survive or even thrive in the face of difficult circumstances.

Resilience is a process not a trait. It is open to influence and it helps to know how to strengthen yours.

An essential element that supports resilience is that people actively choose:

- The information they need and how they get it
- How they respond to the drinking and drug taking
- The support they use
- How they look after themselves.

“When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.”

Viktor Frankl - Man's Search for Meaning

The building blocks of resilience:

- Having a stable person in your life
- Feeling you can overcome hardships and guide your destiny
- Feeling equipped to manage your behaviour and emotions
- Being involved and feeling connected.

While there are different ways to look at strengthening resilience, one way is the I have, I am, and I can factors.

The language of resilience is more than a set of words. It is a set of tools that promote resilience. It is a positive way to see your strengths, abilities, and resources.

- **I HAVE** ...people in my life that care for me and help me.
- **I AM**...a person with inner strengths of confidence, self-esteem, responsibility, autonomy, and talent. I am proud of my identity and culture.
- **I CAN** ...manage emotions, solve problems, stick at things, and think things through.

What do you see you have now?

What could you strengthen?

One of the most important things that came out of the years of research is that “there is no age that has a monopoly on when you can strengthen your resilience”.

Further help and support



We hope this brief guide gave you ideas, hope and that you found it useful. You may want to look to where you can get further support and information.

While it won't be possible to list all the sources of support worldwide, here are some ideas.

The website NHS Choices has further advice.

www.nhs.uk/Livewell/drugs/Pages/caring-for-a-drug-user.aspx

Self help Groups

Al-Anon Family Groups are for the families & friends of people with alcohol problems who share their experience, strength, & hope in order to solve their common problems.

Al-Anon meetings can be found at

<https://al-anon.org/al-anon-meetings/find-an-al-anon-meeting/>

Examples of support

As said on the previous page, it will not be possible to show examples of support worldwide. Here are some examples:

Sources of support in Northern Ireland

<http://www.drugsandalcoholni.info>

A well-being website with a range of information can be found at <https://covidwellbeingni.info/index.html>

For young people: www.stepstocope.co.uk

Sources of support in England

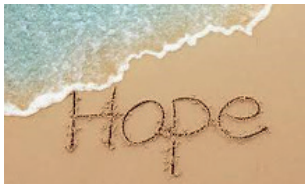
www.adfam.org.uk

Sources of support in USA

<https://www.samhsa.gov/families>

Sources of support elsewhere

Fragile Childhood - Whose aim is to provide information and support for those affected by childhood parental alcohol misuse: <https://lasinenlapsuus.fi/en>



*If you took anything from this guide our hope
is that you took away:*

You are not alone

It is not your fault

It's ok to talk about it

You deserve help in your own right

**What were the key things I learned through this
Pocket Guide?**

How could I use this learning?

The 5-Step Method

The 5-Step Method and associated training courses were developed by AFINet (Addiction and the Family International Network).

Steps to Cope is an adaptation of the 5-Step Method for young people in Northern Ireland through a partnership between ASCERT, South Eastern HSC Trust, Barnardo's and AFINet.

How some adult family members said they benefitted from the 5-Step Method?

'It was about the first time I felt somebody had listened to me....someone was interested in how I was feeling.'

Other interventions that have been developed to support family members include:

Interventions that involve family members to get drug or alcohol users into treatment like Community Reinforcement & Family Training (CRAFT).

Interventions that involve both family members and the drugs and/or alcohol user like Behavioural Couples Therapy, Family Therapy or Social Behaviour & Network Therapy.

Ask, what evidence-based interventions are being used in your area?

Key sources of information and references

Styles of coping was taken from: Coping with Alcohol and Drug Problems, the Experiences of Family Members in Three Contrasting Cultures, Jim Orford, et al, Routledge, Taylor, and Francis Group, 2005.

Building Blocks for Resilience are from Bellis, M et al. (2017).

The language of resiliency is adopted from A Guide to Promoting Resilience in Children: Strengthening the Human Spirit (1995), Edith Grotberg from the Early Childhood Development: Practice and Reflection Series, Bernard Van Leer Foundation.

Other references

1. Orford J, Velleman R, Natera G, Templeton L & Copello A (2013). Addiction in the family is a major but neglected contributor to the global burden of adult ill-health. *Social Science & Medicine*
2. Copello A, Templeton L, Orford J & Velleman R (2010). The 5-Step Method: principles and practice. *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy*
3. Templeton L & Sipler E (2014). Helping children with the Steps to Cope intervention. *Drugs and Alcohol Today*
4. Ed Sipler, Lorna Templeton & Elena Brewer (2019) Steps to Cope: supporting young people affected by parental substance misuse and mental health issues in Northern Ireland, *Advances in Mental Health*
5. Frankl, Viktor E. *Man's Search for Meaning*:(1984) New York: Simon & Schuster

Notes

For a You Tube clip presenting the key messages from this booklet search Ed Sipler on You Tube

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