



## The Do's and Don'ts of Coping with Addiction in the Family

### Try not to do the following:

1. Don't make threats you don't intend to carry out. This will succeed only in reducing your credibility and in weakening the limits that you do intend to enforce.
2. Never argue with an intoxicated person. Nothing can be gained from fighting with an intoxicated person and you may be placing yourself in a dangerous position. If you wish to make some points with the alcoholic/addict in your family, wait until they are sober. Remember that alcoholics and addicts like to provoke a fight because it distracts everybody from their drinking and drugging.
3. Avoid shame, ridicule, or scolding as a means for influencing the alcoholic member of the family. Remember that they often drink out of self-hatred, low self-esteem, and unbearable guilt. By arousing these emotions, you may be increasing their risks of drinking and taking drugs, not reducing these risks.
4. Don't go along with the alcoholic/addict's "alibi" system. Addicted people have many "reasons" why they drink or take drugs. These are little more than "excuses" rather than genuine reasons. Remember that there is no valid reason for an alcoholic or an addict to pick up a drink or a drug. There are only excuses and these are designed to make the drinking and drugging appear reasonable to you and to him or her.
5. Don't lie to the alcoholic or addict about what the drinking and drugging is doing to you, other members of the family and to the alcoholic/addict himself or herself. Tell the truth. Try to stay calm, objective and straightforward but be totally honest. Tell them what is happening in the family but do your best to do so in a non-accusatory, non-blaming, and non-heated way!
6. Try not to give the alcoholic/addict the impression that you are the enemy. The disease of addiction is the enemy. Persuade the alcoholic/addict that you are fighting this terrible disease that can cause so much unhappiness in the family.
7. Don't feel guilty if you have to call the police to restore order in your home. You are not a bad person for wanting to place your family out of harm's way. Moreover, you may be stopping the alcoholic/addict from doing something dangerous to him or herself as well. Remember that it is the addict's behavior that has resulted in a call for help and not your behavior.

#### **Dos and Don'ts**

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Adapted from FAMILY PROGRAM WORKBOOK

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8. Don't cover up for the alcoholic/addict. Let them experience the consequences for their actions. If you try to make things right for them, they won't learn the lessons they need to learn in order to grasp the serious nature of their illness. So don't call bosses, employers, acquaintances and so forth in order to make excuses. Learn all that you can about "enabling" and how to avoid this self-defeating pattern in the family.

9. Don't try to get the alcoholic to stay sober for you. Use of such ploys as "if you loved me, you would stop drinking" usually won't work. Moreover, alcoholics and addicts have to get clean and sober for themselves and not for other people.

10. Don't encourage your alcoholic/addict family member to go with you to social situations in which alcohol and drug use will go on. You can best help your family member in early recovery by avoiding drinking parties, home entertainment centered around alcohol, and any other drinking/drugging situations. In time, the alcoholic family member will likely be able to feel comfortable in social situations that involve drinking but not in the beginning of recovery.

11. Try not to be impatient for recovery to take place. Remember that it probably took a long time for your family to get into this situation and it will probably take some time for really significant improvements to occur. Rejoice in small victories and give everybody time to grow in sobriety. Look for progress in all matters and not perfection.

### **Do the following:**

1. Try to learn the facts about alcoholism and other drug addiction. Keep an open mind.

2. Recognize addiction for what it is—a disease of the body, mind, behavior, and spirit from which people can and do recover. Like other diseases, nobody really intends to get it or wish it upon their loved ones once they have it. Try to remember that the alcoholic/addict in your family isn't doing this at you. This is a disease beyond will power.

3. Practice detachment. Do not allow yourself to become obsessed with your family member. This is sometimes called "release with love." In effect, there are times that you simply must let go and let the alcoholic/addict experience the consequences of their drinking and drug use.

4. Set realistic limits and expectations but don't think that you can exercise complete control over the alcoholic/addict. Change has to come from within them. They need to get sober and clean for themselves if their recoveries are to be maintained.

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5. Practice "tough love," the type of love that does not require you to be a "doormat." Make up your mind what you will accept and what you will not accept from the alcoholic/addict in your family and don't deviate from these. Set realistic limits and make realistic demands.
6. Attend meetings of Al-anon and open meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous. You can learn a great deal about your family situation from hearing the experiences other family members. And you can learn a great deal about alcoholism and other drug addiction from hearing alcoholics and addicts talking honestly about their slide into addiction and their recoveries.
7. Take life a day at a time. It is impossible to predict what will happen with an addicted person in the family. Many do an abrupt about face and get clean and sober just when everybody was ready to give up on them. Remember the saying, ""This too shall pass." Use it when the going gets tough.
8. Take your eyes off of the alcoholic and turn them squarely upon yourself. What do you need to learn about yourself? What are your defects of character that need to be addressed? What are your skills, abilities, interests, and good points? What do you need to do in order to be happy and productive?
9. Remember the needs of other family members during the difficult times of active addiction. Try to be there for your children. Explain the illness of addiction to them in terms they can understand. Plan family outings with or without the alcoholic/addict and carry out the plans. Learn how to have a good time with the family regardless of whether or not the alcoholic member participates.
10. If you find yourself feeling anxious, depressed, helpless and hopeless, seek out a mental health professional who, in addition to expertise in mental health, has some understanding of addiction in the family.