

Helping a family member stop drinking



If someone you love is struggling with alcohol, here are 10 ways to help reduce or stop problematic drinking.

- 1 Support sober pleasurable activities**
Individuals tend to drink because there is an aspect of pleasure obtained from it: stress reduction, social comfort or interaction, mood and anxiety relief, or simple enjoyment from its taste. To get and stay sober, it is important for individuals to find fun and pleasurable activities that don't involve alcohol. Help your family member leave the unhealthy behaviors in the past and replace them with healthy behaviors that still provide a sense of pleasure or enjoyment.
- 2 Educate (or remind) the person about the effects of drinking**
During times when your family member is sober, educate and remind each other about the negative effects that drinking has. These can be effects on the individual, relationships with family and friends, work performance, or other areas of life. Provide helpful facts and feedback that will strengthen your family member's motivation to stop drinking.
- 3 Develop a support plan**
Work together with your family member to create a list of practical ways that you can be a source of support and encouragement. This can be things like: removing alcohol from the home, abstaining from alcohol yourself, not bringing up certain sources of conflict, and daily reminding the person how proud you are for taking on this change.
- 4 Make it a group effort**
There are things you can do, but also know that substance use recovery is a group effort. Make sure there are other people in the life of your family member that are also committed to helping during this process.
- 5 Let negative behaviors lead to their negative consequences**
Avoid protecting your partner, making excuses, or doing special favors when your partner slips. Do not make things easier for them when they drink...let natural consequences occur. At the same time, when your family member slips, do not make things harder by berating, belittling, or bemoaning their recent failures. This type of negative reinforcement tends not to be effective for long-term change.

Note: Certain negative consequences may be too severe to the individual or family and will require some degree of protection and involvement. As a family, determine which instances might require intervention to protect the person or others.

When one member of the family has a drinking problem, the entire family suffers. But it doesn't have to stay that way. A healthy future is possible.

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- 6 Remember that change is a process, not an event**
There is no one 'single thing' that you can do to get your family member to stop drinking. There are, however, lots of little things you can do – day after day after day – that, over time, will aid your family member's recovery, including helping with any mixed feelings about quitting that is a normal part of this process.
- 7 See things from another perspective**
Individuals struggling with alcohol use will likely do things that seem very confusing to you and perhaps incredibly hurtful as well. To help during these times, seek to understand things from this person's perspective and history. Doing so can provide you with more clarity for their behaviors as well as empathy for what they might be going through – both of which will help you respond in ways that will promote positive change.
- 8 Do small things to help your relationship**
Your ability to work as a team during your family member's recovery will require you to be just that – a team. A team that communicates well, supports each other, and is united and committed to your family and your future together.
- 9 Remember that you are only in control of your behavior, not your family member's behavior**
You ultimately cannot force your partner to change. You also cannot control whether, if, or when your partner keeps to an abstinence plan. But you can control how you react – both to the successes and the failures of your family member.
- 10 Seek professional help and resources**
Helping individuals (and families) work through substance use issues is a full-time job for some individuals. There is also decades of research focused on understanding what works in these areas. Use these resources! Whether it's self-directed (books, articles, online programs) or involves the use of a trained counselor or therapist – use these resources! Included at the end of this page are examples of online resources as well as websites to help locate a treatment provider.

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Find a Provider

[Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#) | findtreatment.samhsa.gov
[National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism](#) | alcoholtreatment.niaaa.nih.gov

Additional Resources

[Center for Motivation and Change](#) | cmcffc.org
[Alcohol Rehab Guide](#) | alcoholrehabguide.org

