

When Someone You Love Has an Addiction

When someone you love has an addiction, it is common to see the experience as solely about the person with the addiction. However, addiction is often known as a “family disease.” This is because addiction impacts not only the person using substances, but those who love them.

Common experiences for someone with a family member, partner, or close friend who has an addiction include:

- Guilt or shame
- Codependency
- Caregiving tendencies
- Difficulty setting boundaries
- Loneliness or isolation
- Highly self-critical or perfectionistic tendencies
- Anger and resentment
- Limited coping resources
- Struggles with intimate relationships and healthy communication

(Dayton, 2017; Divento & Saxena, 2016; Haverfield & Theiss, 2014)

Knowing this, it is important to recognize that caring for yourself in a healthy way is important. While this may be at times difficult, it is necessary. If you are experiencing any of the noted common experiences named above, seeking support through counseling or attending support groups for family/friends/partners of people with addiction is vital. Without receiving help and support, you may experience some of the following challenges:

- Substance use concerns of your own
- Behavioral and emotional disruptions
- Depressive symptoms
- Anxiety symptoms
- Low self-esteem/confidence
- Social isolation
- Shame and guilt
- Difficulty making decisions

(Divento & Saxena, 2016; Haverfield & Theiss, 2014; Schroeder & Kelley)

Below are links to important information about addiction in general and in families. Dealing with a loved one who has an addiction is fairly common. You are not alone.

<https://www.ctclearinghouse.org/customer-content/www/topics/coa-important-facts-042105.pdf>

<https://www.addictioncenter.com/addiction/addiction-statistics/>

<https://americanaddictioncenters.org/rehab-guide/addiction-statistics>

Tips for helping in your healing:

1. **Set healthy boundaries.**
 - a. Addiction is a difficult disease. The person with an addiction may try to push boundaries as a result of their dependence on substances. It is important to take a step back in a calm fashion and recognize what boundaries you have, such that your life is not negatively impacted by the needs of a person using substances.
 - b. For instance, if your parent has an addiction and you are heading home for a holiday break, it will be important to know not only what to expect from them, but what you're willing and not willing to put up with. If your parent asks about how college is going, you may choose to respond; if they ask for an extreme request, you may choose not to grant that to them no matter how much they ask. Know your boundaries and stick to them.
2. **Set realistic expectations.** Using the boundary setting example above, it is important to recognize that if you return home for the holidays with a parent who has an addiction, they will not suddenly be free from their addiction without long-term therapeutic work. Be realistic about what to expect; this will help you anticipate what behaviors you may need to cope with and guide you in establishing appropriate boundaries.
3. **Do not use substances with the person who has an addiction.** Not only is it possible for you to develop an addiction, it also sets the precedent that you are okay with their use of substances.
4. **Withstand the urge to rescue or please.** In order to have their needs met, your loved one may add guilt onto a request. Be aware of this possibility and the urge you may have to please them or rescue them from a situation. Refer back to boundary setting: knowing the lines you have set, is what they are asking for something you would allow to happen?
5. **Find a healthy support system.** Reach out to people through your classes, clubs, or organizations. Reach out to an old friend. Make the decision to surround yourself with people who do not struggle with an addiction so they may model healthy relationship patterns.
 - a. This may include attending support groups for loved ones, such as:
 - i. [Al Anon](#)
 - ii. [Nar Anon](#)
 - iii. [SMART Recovery](#)
6. **Learn about addiction.** Empower yourself by knowing what addiction is and what to expect when someone suffers with addiction. This will help you set healthy boundaries and realistic expectations. For resources, follow this link:
(<https://www.towson.edu/counseling/resources/substanceabuse.html>).
7. **Practice self-care and utilize counseling!**
 - a. Growth and recovery is a process. Talking to a counselor and practicing healthy habits will not change your experience overnight. However, it is an important first step toward living a healthier life.

The following links are worth exploring to aid in discovery of healthy coping skills (TUCC links):

<https://www.towson.edu/counseling/resources/selfhelpapps.html>

<https://www.towson.edu/counseling/resources/mindfulness.html>

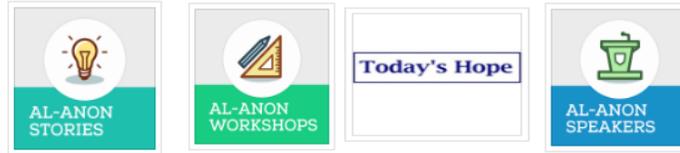
<https://www.towson.edu/counseling/resources/relationships.html>

<https://www.towson.edu/counseling/resources/anxiety.html>

<https://www.towson.edu/counseling/resources/depression.html>

Free Apps!

1. For your recovery



2. For self-care



Additional Resources

Al-anon.org
Nar-anon.org
SMARTrecovery.org
SAMHSA.gov
adultchildren.org

Other Helpful Resources:

<https://www.pyramidhealthcarepa.com/set-boundaries-with-an-addict/>

<https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-dont-adult-children-often-11867212>

http://www.robertjackerman.com/images/stories/counselor_december_2007.pdf

<https://drugabuse.com/library/how-to-stay-healthy-when-someone-you-love-is-addicted/>

Video Resources:

Child of alcoholic parent: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qneoYIT0tOI>

Spouse/general handling active addiction <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z3iwQBcWomg>

Not enabling: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6XZVISDX7Q>

Codependency: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcZMarmxitU>