

## Alcohol and Drug Abuse Hurts Everyone in the Family

Dependence on alcohol and drugs is our most serious national public health problem. It is prevalent among rich and poor, in all regions of the country, and all ethnic and social groups.

Most individuals who abuse alcohol or drugs have jobs and are productive members of society creating a false hope in the family that "it's not that bad."

The problem is that addiction tends to worsen over time, hurting both the addicted person and all the family members. It is especially damaging to young children and adolescents.

People with this illness really may believe that they drink normally or that "everyone" takes drugs. These false beliefs are called denial; this denial is a part of the illness.

### It Doesn't Have to be That Way

Drug or alcohol dependence disorders are medical conditions that can be effectively treated. Millions of Americans and their families are in healthy recovery from this disease.

If someone close to you misuses alcohol or drugs, the first step is to be honest about the problem and to seek help for yourself, your family, and your loved one.

Treatment can occur in a variety of settings, in many different forms, and for different lengths of time. Stopping the alcohol or drug use is the first step to recovery, and most people need help to stop. Often a person with alcohol or drug dependence will need treatment provided by professionals just as with other diseases. Your doctor may be able to guide you.

### Family Intervention Can Start the Healing

Getting a loved one to agree to accept help, and finding support services for all family members are the first steps toward healing for the addicted person and the entire family.

When an addicted person is reluctant to seek help, sometimes family members, friends, and associates come together out of concern and love, to confront the problem drinker. They strongly urge the person to enter treatment and list the serious consequences of not doing so, such as family breakup or job loss.



This is called "intervention." When carefully prepared and done with the guidance of a competent, trained specialist, the family, friends and associates are usually able to convince their loved one – in a firm and loving manner – that the only choice is to accept help and begin the road to recovery. People with alcohol or drug dependence problems can and do recover. Intervention is often the first step.

## Children Need Help Too!

Children in families experiencing alcohol or drug abuse need attention, guidance and support. They may be growing up in homes in which the problems are either denied or covered up.

These children need to have their experiences validated. They also need safe, reliable adults in whom to confide and who will support them, reassure them, and provide them with appropriate help for their age. They need to have fun and just be kids.



Families with alcohol and drug problems usually have high levels of stress and confusion. High stress family environments are a risk factor for early and dangerous substance use, as well as mental and physical health problems.

It is important to talk honestly with children about what is happening in the family and to help them express their concerns and feelings. Children need to trust the adults in their lives and to believe that they will support them.

Children living with alcohol or drug abuse in the family can benefit from participating in educational support groups in their school student assistance programs. Those ages 11 and older can join Alateen groups, which meet in community settings and provide healthy connections with others coping with similar issues. Being associated with the activities of a faith community can also help.



**The material found in this document has been adapted from the brochure “Alcohol and Drug Addiction Happens in the Best of Families...And it Hurts” available at <http://store.samhsa.gov/product/PHD1112>.**