

It can be difficult for families and friends when someone they care about is using alcohol and other drugs. This fact sheet provides information to help a friend or family member and suggests some tips on how people can look after themselves. It is also important to remember everyone responds differently and there is no 'right' approach. But there are some simple things you can try that may help.

Tips for family and friends

Alcohol and or other drugs can change the way your friend or family member thinks, acts and behaves. A normal response may be for you to feel worried, helpless, or upset. The following tips may help you with these feelings.

- **Try not to panic.** If you have only recently found out that a friend or family member is using alcohol or drugs try not to panic. Most people's use doesn't become a problem and they usually stop or cut back their use on their own.
- **Be aware.** Not everyone is ready to stop or cut back their alcohol or drug use and some people may not be ready to change. Discussing the problem can be difficult. However, it is important to share your concerns.
- **Support change.** Not everyone's goal is to stop and it's important to support your friend or family member who is trying to change their use. Some positive changes could be using less, using in a safer way or improving their health and wellbeing.
- **Slip-ups.** It's important to remember that most people when they are making changes have a 'slip-up'. Having a slip-up doesn't mean that a person is going to return to a previous level of use and is a normal part of the recovery process. It's a real opportunity to learn and be ready to encourage them to keep going and not give up.
- **Provide support.** It is normal for people who are stopping or cutting back to experience low mood, anxiety, poor sleep and irritability. Some things that can help are encouraging them to develop good sleep habits, eat a healthy diet, exercise regularly, avoid 'triggers' (i.e. people, places or events associated with using).

- **Stay connected.** It is important to keep your friend or family member involved in social activities if possible. However, you may need to think about replacing activities which may involve alcohol and drugs.
- **Get information.** Getting the facts and being informed can help you understand the drug, its effects, and highlight some of the harms that may be experienced. You can get reliable information and support from ADIS.

Tips when talking with family and friends who are using alcohol and other drugs.

It can be challenging for families and friends when discussing a person's alcohol and drug use. Some people are worried about how their friend or family member will react. Here are some hints and tips that may be helpful in guiding the conversation.

- **Put yourself in their shoes.** Before starting, think about how you would like to be approached, and reflect on the situation. Try and think about what you would like to say before starting the conversation.
- **Arrange a time and place.** Choose somewhere convenient, quiet and where you won't be interrupted. Don't try and talk to the person if they have been drinking or using drugs, or if they are recovering or 'coming down'.
- **Start by listening.** It may be helpful to understand why they are using alcohol or other drugs. Avoid lecturing or blaming a person about their alcohol or drug use.
- **Avoid name calling.** When talking to a person avoid negative labels such as "drunk", "addict", or "junkie".
- **Explain your concerns.** Discuss their actions clearly and calmly, and explain why you are worried rather than criticising them as a person. Let the person know how their drug use is impacting you by using "I" statements, rather than "you" statements.
- **Try to ask questions.** Ask them if they would like any support and reassure them that professional help is available.

Here are some ways to help look after yourself

It is important for people to look after themselves and here are some things that may help.

- Make sure that you are getting enough food, rest and exercise, and don't stop doing things that you enjoy.
- Remember that people are responsible for their own actions. You can encourage people to change, but you can't make others do things they don't want to do.
- Talk to an understanding friend about the problem or seek support. Talking to someone such as a professional counsellor or doctor can be a great help.
- Attend a peer support group or join an online support group which are voluntary self-help groups for friends and family members. Some peer and online support groups include Family Drug Support, Al-Anon and SMART Recovery.
- Provide clear boundaries and expectations about what is acceptable and what is not acceptable in your house, family and relationships. This can help to ensure that everyone feels safe and secure.

What help is available?

ADIS is a 24 hour, 7 day a week confidential support service for people in Queensland with alcohol and other drug concerns, their loved ones and health professionals.

Talk to us. Anytime, anywhere.
1800 177 833

What should I do in an emergency?

If someone is expressing thoughts about self-harm, has collapsed or lost consciousness, call an ambulance on **triple zero (000)**. If they have stopped breathing commence CPR. If they are breathing normally, place them into the recovery position and continue to monitor them.

