



DrugFree@WorkPlace

Living With a Substance Abuser

People who live with a loved one struggling with addiction are often deeply affected by the experience. The addicted person causes problems for family members at home and at work.

To attempt to deal with the issues, there is a tendency to constantly try to get the addict or alcoholic to change his or her behavior—which causes nothing but frustration and stress for both parties. But by adjusting *your* attitude and *your* approach, you can put things in a different, more healthy perspective and stop allowing another person's problems to ruin your life and possibly jeopardize your job. The following are some things you can do to help ease the pressure and pain of living with a substance abuser.

Change Your Reactions

Drug addicts and alcoholics typically try to blame their substance abuse on others. But don't accept the excuse. Addicts are going to drink and use drugs regardless of what others do (or don't do), so stop blaming yourself. It's not your fault.

The brain chemistry of someone who is addicted may have changed to the point that he is completely surprised by some of the things he says and by the choices he makes. He may not be in control of his own decision-making. So, don't take it personally. You have to understand and accept that you can't control his drinking and drugging, and you are not responsible for his behavior.

Don't Allow Unacceptable Behavior

Allowing an addicted person to engage in unacceptable behavior usually starts

with something small but gets worse each time. Before you know it, you find yourself in a full-blown abusive relationship. No one should have to live with abuse, especially children. Don't allow an addict or alcoholic to do anything to hurt you or your kids.

Stop Rescuing and Enabling

Wanting to help an addicted loved one when he is in the middle of a crisis is a natural reaction for family members, but that is usually the time when the family should do nothing.

When an alcoholic or drug abuser reaches a crisis point, it could finally be the situation that causes the person to admit he has a problem and begin to seek help. But if you rush in and rescue the person it can delay the decision to get well. When substance abusers reach the point in their addiction where they lose their job or get arrested, it's difficult for loved ones to accept that the best thing they can do is to do nothing. But saving the addict from the consequences of their actions only causes the cycle to repeat.

Family members typically feel embarrassed by the addict's actions and try to cover for them to "save the family name." But dealing with the problem openly and honestly is the best approach. To not do so is to enable the person to continue in his or her addiction.

Addiction is a chronic, progressive disease of the brain. It gets worse and worse until the addicted person takes action to begin to get well. But that will not happen until the addict is allowed to experience the negative consequences of his actions.

Take Care of Yourself

There may be very little you can do to help the addict or alcoholic until he or she is ready to get help, but you can stop letting someone's drug and alcohol problems dominate your life and jeopardize your job. It's okay to make choices that are good for your own physical and mental health. Healing yourself involves being able to say several things, including:

- You no longer have to deny the presence of addiction in your family.
- You no longer have to control the addict's using.
- You no longer have to rescue the addict.
- You no longer have to be interested in the addict's reasons for using.
- You no longer have to accept or extract promises.
- You no longer have to seek advice from the ill-informed.
- You no longer have to nag, preach, coax, or gesture.
- You no longer need to allow the addict to abuse you or your children.
- You no longer have to be a victim of addiction.

Get Professional Help

It's rare that the impact of an addiction is limited solely to the addict. Everyone around him or her is affected in some way. Frequently, the people who spend the most time around the addict are friends, family, and coworkers—these are the people who are likely to be most impacted by drug addiction or alcoholism.

Family members, especially non-addicted spouses, are forced to pick up the slack for the addict, make excuses for his or her behavior, and potentially endure sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. In many cases, extended family members and close friends have to help financially and in other ways to account for the ignored responsibilities by the addict.

Children suffer in school and socially and are more likely to be involved with drugs and alcohol as adults. Coworkers are not always as close to the addict, but they may also be affected by having to increase their workloads to make up for diminished job performance. Nearly every person in contact with an addict is impacted in some way.

This is why addiction recovery is so important and is most successful when the friends and family members closest to the addict are involved. Since addiction damages the whole family, addiction recovery needs to heal the whole family. Seek help through organizations like Nar-Anon at <https://www.nar-anon.org/>.