

# Do's and Don'ts

## OF SUPPORTING A SPOUSE AFFECTED BY SUBSTANCE USE



Being the spouse of someone affected by substance use, you may struggle to understand how to help. Here is a list of the do's and don'ts of supporting a spouse who struggles with substance use

### DO'S



#### EDUCATE YOURSELF

A little knowledge can go a long way when someone you love wants to confide in you



#### DON'T JUDGE

Passing judgment will not be beneficial to your spouse's recovery.



#### BE PATIENT

Remember that this is a gradual process, it takes time to heal properly



#### OPEN COMMUNICATION

You should make it clear that your spouse can talk to you when they are ready



#### IGNORE IT

If they are struggling with substance use you can help them find a recovery program



#### ENABLE

This validates the behaviour and will not prompt change

### DON'TS

# DO'S AND DON'TS OF SUPPORTING A LOVED ONE AFFECTED BY SUBSTANCE USE

## DOS

**Educating** yourself is a good first step! You could start by researching the recovery process. A little knowledge can go a long way when someone you love is struggling. Check out our resource page for some information to get you started.

**Open Communication** is vital, to maintain a connection with one another. Make it clear to your loved one that they can talk to you when they are ready. This can help you understand what they are feeling. Remember not to pressure them into talking about their painful experiences.

**Avoid Blaming.** Blame, judgment and shaming them for their past mistakes can make their recovery harder and slower. Also, do not blame yourself. Substance abuse can impact everyone, and the most helpful way to approach it is by focusing on recovery and the future.

**Be Patient** with your loved one during the recovery process. It takes time to heal, and to learn a new path forward.

## DONTS

**Ignore** the issue, as it will cause more issues. No matter what the cause, don't try to pretend that your loved one's substance misuse is not a problem.

**Enable** your loved one by encouraging negative behaviors. Enabling happens when we make excuses for their substance use or cover it up for them. Enabling is NOT supporting, and Supporting is NOT enabling.

**Expect things to go back to normal.** Once your loved one is actively working to remain sober, your life and relationship will never be the same as it was. There will be a new normal, which is a good thing. No matter how good things seemed before, that before was marred by substance abuse. Instead of waiting for things to go to normal, work on strengthening the relationship.

## **EFFECTS OF SUBSTANCE MISUSE ON A MARRIAGE**

Addiction can take a serious toll on personal relationships and particularly on marriages. One of the biggest problems caused by substance abuse is financial strain. Addiction can be very costly and have a negative impact on family finances.

Substance abuse can lead to arguments and fights, which could in turn lead to more substance abuse. There are a number of things that could be argued about when you are married to an addict. Arguments can occur about their drug or alcohol use, staying out late, or neglecting home responsibilities. If you have been unaware or lied to about your spouse's use of drugs and alcohol, your trust in them could be negatively affected.

Trust is the most important part of a marriage and substance abuse could erode the trust that forms the foundation of your relationship. Lies about where the addicted spouse is or what they're doing could continue throughout early recovery. Trust issues may persist throughout this time and both parties will need to work on this area.

We have covered many issues that can arise in marriages with an addict. Neglecting to communicate with one another could lead to these and many more issues. Although issues will seem to be overwhelming, remember that you and your spouse are partners and try to use these struggles to bring you closer.

## **IMPACT ON THE SPOUSE**

It is normal to feel lost and overwhelmed. It is likely that you have been hurt by their past actions. It is acceptable to bring up this hurt in the right setting, as long as you do it in a way that doesn't blame the struggling individual for your troubles. Intimate relationships should feel safe and comfortable for each person. When you're married to an addict, this is not always the case. Fortunately, there are plenty of things you can do to cope with the new reality in which you live.