

how to help a loved one

Struggling with Substance Use Disorder





Contents

Witnessing substance use disorders can hurt Page 03

What is a Substance Use Disorder (SUD)? Page 04

What can I do? Page 06

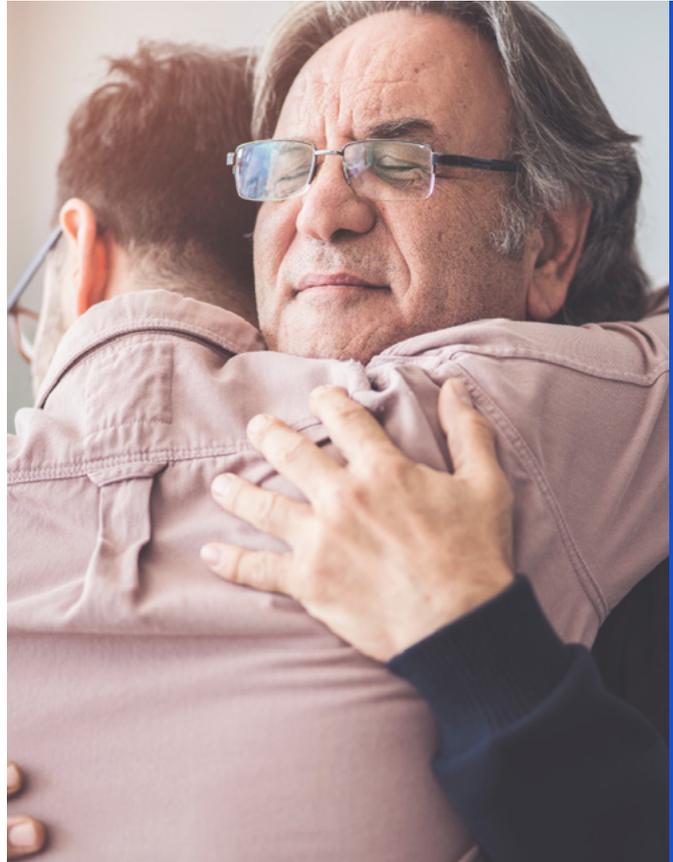
Contact Us Page 12

Witnessing substance use disorders can hurt.

When someone you care about deeply is dealing with something as challenging as substance use disorder, standing by and watching them suffer can be incredibly painful.

What makes the situation even more difficult is not knowing what you can do to support them. What helps and what hurts?

While everything may seem out of your control, there are ways for you to get involved to help your loved one begin their journey with recovery.



This guide will provide resources and information so you have a place to start.



What is a Substance Use Disorder (SUD)?

Watching a loved one experience a substance use disorder can feel especially overwhelming when you don't know much about addiction and recovery.

Past stigma and prejudices surrounding this condition created immense amounts of fear for loved ones.

While it can absolutely be a scary experience, learning more about it from an educational lens can help you engage with your loved one in a calm, understanding way.

While most of us are familiar with the word "addiction," "Substance Use Disorder" is a term that is new to many people.

Substance Use Disorder (SUD) is a more medically accurate, less stigmatizing way of discussing the mental health condition that affects how someone's brain and body respond to the use of substances like alcohol, opioids, and more. A person with a substance use disorder is unable to regulate their use of substances.

Their misuse of drugs, alcohol, and other substances may look like a choice to an outsider, but they are actually experiencing a very real condition that makes it feel nearly impossible for them to change their habits.



Unfortunately, many know all too well the impact of substance use disorder on the friends, families, and coworkers of those encountering it.

Even when your loved one is exhibiting behaviours that concern you, it's important to understand that SUD is not a moral failing. While people are still responsible for what they say and do while under the influence, those with SUD are majorly affected by their mental health concerns.

Their decisions usually aren't intended to be mean or hurtful. **Until they're able to get the help they need and make a choice themselves to enter into their recovery journey, it's hard for them to understand their own actions.**



Watching a loved one with SUD suffer and face challenges like losing their job, going in and out of the hospital, facing legal repercussions, and being unable to control their behaviors and emotions is indescribable.





What can I do?



While the decision to enter into care has to be made by the person experiencing SUD, there are things you can do to support your loved one.

Prioritize your well-being

It may seem counterintuitive to put yourself first in order to help your loved one, but this is one of the most essential steps in being a great support system. You must prioritize your mental and physical well-being, even when the people around you are in pain. It's like what flight attendants say prior to taking off, "In the event of an emergency, please secure your mask before helping others." Prioritizing your well-being takes some TLC, but doing so will make you best equipped to help others when they need it.



Another easy way to care for yourself during this time is by considering "bibliotherapy," which means reading therapeutic or professionally-selected books, usually in conjunction with therapy or counseling. Well-researched, medically-accurate books about substance use disorder and coping as a friend or family member can help you feel seen and heard. **One such book often recommended by our team of professionals is *Get Your Loved One Sober* by Brenda L. Wolfe and Robert J. Meyers.**

If professional help seems like too much for you to start, look for support groups in your area. You'd be surprised at how many people are going through something very similar.

Sometimes, just talking about it with people who understand can make a world of difference in how you feel. Plus, making friends with people facing similar circumstances means you can share and learn about what helps the situation and what worsens it.



Share about available resources

One of the best ways you can support your loved ones while caring for yourself is by recommending professional help. Expect pushback, especially when you first bring up the topic of addiction and recovery. Many with substance use disorders don't recognize that they have a problem. **It may take weeks, months, or even years of pushing for professional help before they try it.**

However, remaining consistent in drawing their attention toward help means that it will cross their mind in difficult times, which is incredibly important. They'll know that there are options for real, lasting recovery and that you will support them through this journey.

When considering treatment options for your loved one, it's important to look for providers who promote harm reduction and whole-person care. "Harm reduction" refers to treatment strategies that aim to reduce the harmful effects of substance use first and foremost, rather than emphasizing the need for total sobriety. Harm reduction approaches are evidence-based and have shown to be more effective in preventing overdose death and promoting habits that more often lead to long-term recovery.

"Whole-person care" is an approach to treatment that recognizes the intricacies of a person's health and promotes caring for all aspects, including mental, physical, emotional, and social health, rather than only treating physical symptoms. **Most people with substance use disorder have co-occurring mental and physical disorders that directly impact their SUD.**



By choosing care that helps address these underlying issues, your loved one can receive the most well-rounded, effective treatment.

01

Inpatient Treatment



There are many types of treatment for substance use disorder. Most people are familiar with inpatient programs, often referred to as “rehab.” These programs **require the person to live in a facility and be regularly monitored to prevent any substance use.** This is a full-time program, often ranging from weeks to months, depending on an individual’s specific needs. However, inpatient programs can be very pricey, and returning home afterward can be incredibly triggering, since “home” may be a reminder, or trigger, of their substance use before treatment.

02

Outpatient Treatment



Another effective option for those whose SUD isn’t severely impacting their ability to function day-to-day or for those who have recently come out of inpatient care is outpatient treatment. **This form of support allows a person to continue going to work, living at home, participating in hobbies, and seeing friends and family as usual. They’ll see a team of providers on a regular basis to manage their care and recovery.** Outpatient treatment may not be the best option for those who are in especially triggering home environments and may find relief in the change of pace of inpatient care. Eleanor Health is an example of an outpatient provider. We work with your loved one to build a care plan that best fits their goals and needs to ensure empathetic treatment and long-term recovery.

03

Medication-assisted Treatment (MAT)



Many people often overlook the need for medication to assist with recovery. While it may seem counterintuitive on the surface to use controlled substances in recovery, it's important to understand the crucial role that professionally managed medication can play in preventing overdose and aiding in long-term recovery. Medications like Suboxone and Vivitrol help curb cravings, which means that a person is more easily able to consciously choose not to take a substance. Other medications can help reduce or change the impact substances have on a person to help reduce the risk of misuse. **Research shows that medication-assisted treatment may reduce the risk of death from overdose by as much as 60% in a year, which makes it an incredible tool for giving people an even better chance at overcoming their addiction.**

04

Support Groups



Support groups can be an amazing way to connect with others in a similar situation for additional care in recovery. If your loved one isn't attending a local support group, try encouraging them to do so. Once they have a healthy outlet to share and get to know people with similar experiences, they may be more inclined to attend regularly and look into other treatment options. **Support groups are more accessible now than ever. Most are free community resources and many are also available online.**

What about an intervention?

While many support members may consider an intervention, it's important to understand that interventions are not as simple and effective as they appear to be in popular media. Often, they can leave your loved one feeling judged and overwhelmed, which isn't what you want.

Conversations around treatment and recovery should always be **empathetic and understanding** -interventions often fail to follow that message. Not to mention most people who would be included in this conversation lack the mental health or medical training necessary to actually understand what your loved one is going through. Consider other ways of supporting your loved one, rather than this outdated option.

Your loved one may not be ready to enter into treatment yet, and that's ok. Watching them continue with substance use may be stressful and painful, but you cannot force them into something they aren't ready for.



Be patient and remember you're doing the best you can

Despite all the great advice you receive and the major effort you put into helping, everyone's journey with substance use disorder is different. Your loved one's journey will be unpredictable and unique, so it's important to understand that you are not responsible for how things may turn out. It will likely be an incredibly difficult journey to witness as a family member or friend - give yourself plenty of grace for what you may say or do and talk to someone about how you're feeling.

Despite your best efforts, there is much out of your control in this situation. Don't hold yourself accountable for fixing them. Instead, focus on how you can be a support person on the sidelines of their life, focusing most of your energy on your life and what you can control.



We're Here to Help

For help navigating this hard time and connecting your loved one to resources, call us at:

877-759-5017

We're here to help carry this burden - you don't have to go through this alone.

 **eleanor health**



Additional Resources

- Another good place to start is your local public health agencies or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services branch. SAMHSA's website features a directory and map of treatment facilities across the country. Check out the SAMHSA Treatment Locator here: <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov>
- Eleanor Health is also proud to partner with various insurance companies as well as other SUD treatment organizations, like We The Village. If you want to support your loved one in treatment, We The Village is here to support you with skills shown to increase treatment entry and retention. To learn more about We The Village and sign up for their proven program or free online community, head to: www.wethevillage.co