

SUPPORTING SOMEONE WITH AN ADDICTION

BE KIND

Show you care through your behavior—act with kindness and compassion no matter how hard it gets. Addiction is so stigmatized in our society, people who have addictions expect others to criticize, insult, and belittle them, and friends and family to reject them. By accepting the person with an addiction—even if you don't accept their behavior—you can start to build bridges to forgiveness and recovery. Let them know that you still love and care about them, no matter how serious their addiction.

LISTEN MORE THAN YOU TALK

Whether they are a loved one or not, a person with an addiction is more likely to confide in you about what is really going on for them if you listen without interrupting or criticizing. Even if you do not agree with their behavior, you can be empathetic and listen to their side of things. Allow for non-judgmental conversation where they can be open and honest about what they are dealing with.

SET BOUNDARIES

As long as someone with an addiction does not know how much their behavior bothers you, they have no reason to change. Let them know your limits by setting clear boundaries—and then stick with them. Make a plan for follow-through with each boundary so you have a clear understanding of what *your* next steps will be if the boundary is crossed. Sharing counseling sessions with your loved one and a professional can be a safe way to set boundaries without feeling punitive.

BE CONSISTENT

Remain consistent in your message, so that they don't misunderstand what you want or expect of them. For example, don't say you think your partner has a drinking problem, and then share a bottle of wine over dinner. Be predictable in your words and actions whenever you are around someone with an addiction. Surprises can be stressful and stress feeds addiction.

SUPPORT THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

The road to recovery will be a life-long journey, so educate yourself on the process of change. Relapse, therapy, inpatient and outpatient treatments—there will be a lot of ups and downs for the person recovering. As a support, you will want to be prepared for what may come up and help encourage them no matter what comes up.

HELP THEM SEEK HELP

People often feel ashamed of their addiction, and the fear of being reported to the police or another authority may be one of the biggest obstacles to seeking help. Offer to research ways to get help; even if the person refuses, you can find help for yourself. Seeing you get help and improving your mood and functioning can be inspiring to them, as they see that change is possible.

