

YOUR GUIDE TO
CAVDAS services
for Families and
Concerned Others



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In this guide we will look at ways of coping with feelings such as guilt, shame, anger and upset.

There is no magic wand that can make the problems go away but we hope this guide, along with keyword sessions or groups, will help you to communicate more positively to your family member about their drug or alcohol use, reduce enabling behaviour, prioritise your own wellbeing as well as set and keep boundaries for yourself.



Is There a Drug/Alcohol Problem?

When we use the term drug or substance in this guide, we mean all substances including alcohol, prescription medication, legal, illicit and controlled substances.

Secondly, when we refer to a drug or substance use problem we mean where a person's substance use is impacting negatively on their life, work and relationships.

Written below is a list of behaviours which may indicate that there could be a substance use problem:

- Denies using substances, when there is evidence to suggest otherwise, e.g. empty bottles or paraphernalia.
- Becomes unnecessarily secretive in their manner.
- Trying to hide their use of drugs/alcohol from you.
- Avoid discussing their substance use.
- Trying to show that they are misusing substances to a lesser degree than they actually are.
- Denies having any serious problems because they only use a "soft drug", e.g. cannabis, beer, etc. or that others have worse problems than them.
- Behaving in a different manner when intoxicated by the substance e.g. possibly quieter and more withdrawn than normal, or on the other hand, they could be louder and more aggressive than normal.
- Denies things have happened when intoxicated.

- Forgets things that happened during intoxication, (memory loss).
- Minimises both the amount and frequency of problems related to their substance use.
- Social problems e.g., less interest in things that seemed important to them, lack of interest / problems in work, lack of motivation, financial problems, disassociating with old friends, family conflicts, conflict with the police.
- Appears to have a low self-image and low self-esteem, i.e. using substances to boost confidence.
- Takes substantially less interest in their personal hygiene.
- Chooses a new set of friends that seem to demonstrate similar behaviour e.g. using substances, struggling with relationships.

However, we usually find the family member/concerned other knows the person best and often has their own explanation for how they know they are using substances, even if they don't know anything about the drug they are using.



Your Thoughts and Feelings

It is very common to feel the following emotions:

- Upset
- Anger
- Anxiety or feeling worried all the time or unable to focus on anything
- Shame
- Guilt, feeling you are to blame. This is especially common if the family member is your child
- Isolation
- Overwhelmed, not having time to focus on yourself or others in your family except the person using substance.



Controlling The Situation

Often, if a person is misusing substances, other people then try to 'control the situation'. They may try to do this by:

- Questioning them e.g. Who they've been with? Where have they been?
- Checking up on them e.g. checking their clothes for any signs of drugs, alcohol or paraphernalia.
- Threatening them or giving ultimatums
- Emotional blackmail
- Shaming them
- Punishing them

Trying to control someone's substance use is often ineffective as:

- It doesn't work. As much as we would like to, we cannot control another person's behaviour and cannot be with someone 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Attempts at control may make that person feel resentful, more likely to rebel, become deceitful and start hiding their substance use as well as possibly escalating their substance use.
- The more time and effort you put into trying to manage someone's behaviour the angrier and more resentful you feel when you don't get the results from your family member that you are looking for. When attempts to control the situation fail, the concerned other often simply tries harder - thus compounding the negative results described above. This may become a vicious circle.
- If all of your energy becomes focused on ensuring that this person does not use substances, yours and the other family members' needs are likely to be neglected.

Enabling

This is something that the family member does that unintentionally increases drinking/drug taking or makes it easier for them to continue this behaviour. The overall goal is to make recovery from substances easier than being addicted. However, a lot of enabling behaviour helps to keep the person addicted by making things easier for them and providing a buffer from challenges.



Natural Consequences:

If the family members stop enabling behaviours such as:

- Writing sick notes/calling their manager to make excuses for them.
- Organising medical appointments/ insisting they go to certain appointments
- Lending or giving them money.
- Making excuses for your loved one's behaviour to yourself and others.
- Pretending nothing is wrong.
- Hiding their behaviour from family, friends, neighbours etc.
- Taking them to buy drugs.
- Paying debts or household bills

It allows natural consequences to happen. This in turn will make addiction seem like a worse choice than recovery and encourage motivation to change.



Detachment

Detachment is easy to talk about but can be hard to put into practice and sustain. Detachment does not mean that you stop loving the person who has the problem with substances. It allows you to take a step back and look at the whole situation and get a clearer picture of what is happening.

Detachment allows us to see that we're only responsible for our own behaviour and anyone else's is outside of our control. It can often be helpful to prioritise your own goals, happiness and well-being, then you will have the energy to offer positive support to your family member.

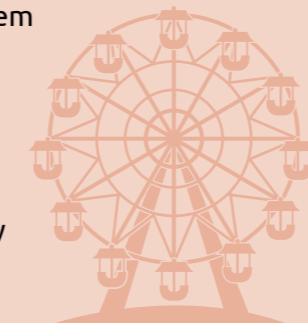
In turn your loved one then becomes totally responsible for their own actions and decisions, including their substance

use and the choices they make. It is ok for you to tell your loved one how you feel, what you believe and how you are now taking responsibility for your own life, and they need to do the same.

While you are detaching from the actions of your loved one, you can still help them deal with the situation without taking responsibility for them, this will allow you to assist in a way that best helps them, without enabling them.

Your detachment means you are able to:

- To disentangle your own life and your loved one's life. That is, no longer relying on them being drug free for your happiness and contentment
- To stop being anxious and fearful and to rebuild your own self-esteem
- To help your loved one take responsibility for their own life and choices.



Setting Boundaries

Essentially, when you set boundaries, you are creating a set of basic ground rules for everyone to live within your home, also aiming to create healthy relationships. You may want to address some of the following issues:



- Are you happy with your loved one using certain substances?
- Do you want drugs in your home?
- Do you want other substance users visiting your home?
- Are you happy with them coming and going at all times of the day or night?
- What about your safety, or the safety of others?

You have to decide for yourself what is acceptable to you and what is not. You need to be very clear in your definition of this from the outset.

You need to present these boundaries to your loved one so that he/she understands them fully; they should also be realistic and achievable. It may be a good idea if these rules are written down and each of you have a copy – you may need to refer to it on times.

If boundaries are set, stick to them, otherwise they become ultimatums and lose their effect.

Breaking these rules will have consequences – perhaps even legal consequences.



In detaching from your loved one's behaviour, and not enabling them, you're not abandoning them. You are not saying that you don't care. You are saying that you will no longer condone or collude with their negative behaviour.

One way you can do this is to set boundaries; these represent what is acceptable to you and what isn't. They are a form of protection for yourself and your personal wellbeing. An example of a boundary would be: 'I do not want you to drink alcohol in the house'.

It is ok for you to tell your loved one how you feel, what you believe and how you are now taking responsibility for your own life, and they need to do the same.

Consequences

Consequences are what you decide you will do if your boundaries have been broken. These consequences are individual to your own situation, we can explore them with you but you must decide what is appropriate to your own situation and what you are comfortable with.

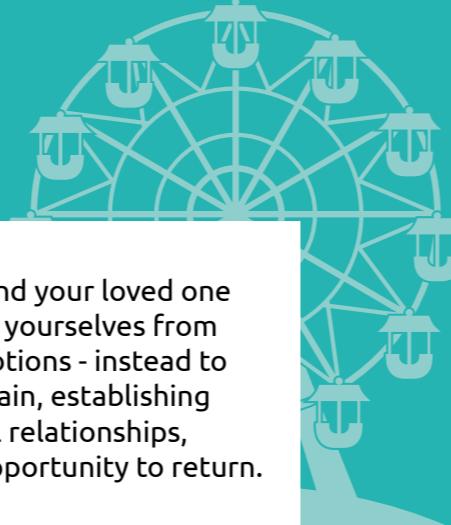
The changes that you make may not be liked or welcomed. Your loved one may become awkward and test your boundaries with demanding and manipulative behaviour.

You will need to be aware and on your guard against being influenced into lowering your boundaries and lessening your consequences. You may find that both family and outside support are needed here to help remain firm.

The purpose of setting boundaries is:

- To ensure that by experiencing the consequences of their substance use and undesirable behaviour, your loved one will have a reason to stop using. When they don't experience any consequences, there is no reason to change!
- To help establish a healthy relationship based on clear guidelines of what is acceptable to you.
- To protect you from the unacceptable behaviour of others, as you have let people know what you won't tolerate.
- To allow them to start taking responsibility for themselves, including ownership of their own behaviour and problem with substance use.
- When it is seen that you will not be manipulated - and they know that there are consequences to breaking the boundaries - it is possible that behaviour will change.

Your loved one may become awkward and test your boundaries with demanding and manipulative behaviour.



This may enable you and your loved one to be able to untangle yourselves from a web of negative emotions - instead to become individuals again, establishing healthy and respectful relationships, where trust has the opportunity to return.



Leaving The Chaos Behind

If a person is misusing substances, chaos can rule the home.

The substance takes over everything, often it becomes the third person in the relationship or the relationship with the substance is stronger than the one with you.

The atmosphere can be one of fear, anger and resentment. The needs of other family members may be pushed aside. The whole family can be pre-occupied with the 'problem'. Isolation may occur for you and your loved one.

Instead, You Deserve

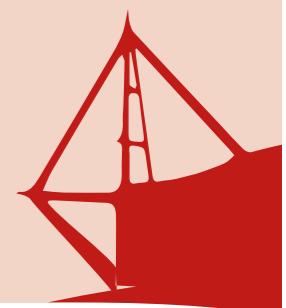
- To be able to get on with your own life. To self-care and have enjoyment in your life.
- To be able to spend as much of your time as you choose with other family members. To rebuild your relationships with them.
- To be confident that you are HELPING your loved one to overcome their substance use problem and NOT enabling them to continue.



In Summary

- If you enable your loved one's behaviour - they will have no reason to change. So if you feel this is happening and you change it, it helps them to feel the consequences of their actions.
- You cannot control your loved one's behaviour - no matter how hard you try. So stop trying to do this. Instead, you start to change your own behaviour and you detach - this is necessary for you to see clearly and help your loved one take responsibility for their own actions.
- You set firm boundaries - these represent what is acceptable to you. Make it very clear to the person that breaking these boundaries will have consequences.

Above all find help and support, whether that is informal or professional.





For free, confidential information, advice and support:

Below are the CAVDAS bases where you can drop in for an informal chat or arrange an appointment at a time to suit you:

**7 St Andrews Place
Cardiff
CF10 3BE**

**2-10 Holton Road
Barry
CF63 4HD**

**218 Cowbridge Road
Cardiff
CF5 1GX**

**Children and young
people's base.**

**Y Lanfa, St Clair Court,
3-11 West Bute Street,
Cardiff
CF10 5EN**

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