

A photograph of a young woman wearing a patterned hijab and an older woman with grey curly hair embracing her. They are both looking out a window with a blurred view of a building and trees.

WHEN IT HAPPENS TO YOUR FAMILY:

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD THROUGH
ADDICTION TREATMENT AND RECOVERY



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When your child has an addiction, nothing can describe the melting pot of emotions you feel. Fear, frustration, anger and hopelessness may dominate your waking hours, taking a toll on your quality of life and well-being.

The National Council of Alcoholism and Drug Dependence calls addiction a family disease, because one family member's addiction affects all of the other family members.¹ It can lead to deep dysfunction in the family system as each member develops unhealthy coping strategies to deal with upsetting experiences. The family unit becomes absorbed by the addiction, and life may start to feel as though it's spinning out of control.

Getting your child into a high-quality treatment program is essential for successful recovery. But while treatment can help your child end an addiction for the long-term, successful recovery will depend on the level of support your child receives during and after treatment. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration stresses that a safe, stable place to live and a high level of support from friends and family are two fundamental components of successful recovery.²

Here, we'll discuss the important ways in which you can support your child before, during and after treatment.



ADDICTION & DEPENDENCE:

A SHORT PRIMER



The number-one most important thing you can do to support your child before, during and after treatment is to fully understand addiction and dependence and how they're diagnosed and treated.

What is Substance Abuse?

Substance abuse is the act of using drugs in a way that causes problems. These may be related to money, the law, relationships or health. Binge drinking is the most common form of drug abuse and occurs when you use enough alcohol in the space of two hours to bring your blood alcohol content up to .08 percent.

**ADDICTION IS THE RESULT OF
CHANGES IN BRAIN FUNCTION
AND STRUCTURE THAT OCCUR
WITH CHRONIC DRUG OR
ALCOHOL ABUSE.**

What is Addiction?

Addiction is a chronic and relapsing disease. Much like diabetes and heart disease, addiction begins with lifestyle choices, but once it develops, choice is no longer a factor. Whether an addiction develops depends on a number of factors, including biology, genetics, environment and personality.

Addiction is the result of changes in brain function and structure that occur with chronic drug or alcohol abuse. Drugs, including alcohol, flood the brain with dopamine and other "feel-good" brain chemicals. The reward, memory, learning and motivation centers of the brain work together to solidify the association between the drug use and the pleasure it produces.

These areas of the brain communicate in a way that may eventually produce a strong motivation to use drugs. This motivation comes in the form of cravings, which are produced by the same mechanisms that drive us to eat food and procreate. The substance use becomes a necessity.



Addiction changes the way you think and behave. It leads to unhealthy thought patterns like black-and-white thinking, catastrophizing and dwelling on the negative. It can lead to pessimism, a distrust of others, self-centeredness and resentment. Addiction fosters self-destructive behaviors like lying or stealing, neglecting self-care and engaging in high-risk situations while procuring drugs or while under their influence.

Addiction is characterized by compulsive drug or alcohol use despite negative consequences. The National Institute on Drug Abuse stresses that once an addiction develops, willpower and good intentions are rarely enough to end the addiction for the long-term.³ Professional help is almost always needed.

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What is Dependence?

Dependence is a physical reliance on drugs. As dopamine and other neurotransmitters flood the brain when you use drugs, your brain changes the way it functions in order to compensate. As the brain continues to change its chemical functions, tolerance develops. This means that it takes increasingly larger doses to get the desired effects.

At some point, brain function may shift so that the brain is more comfortable when drugs are present than when they're not. Then, when you stop using, normal brain function rebounds, and this causes withdrawal symptoms to set in. These symptoms are different for each type of drug, and they're the primary indication that a dependence has developed.





HOW SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS ARE DIAGNOSED

Substance abuse, addiction and dependence are diagnosed under the umbrella of "substance use disorders." A substance use disorder will be characterized as mild, moderate or severe based on how many of the eleven criteria you meet. Meeting two or three criteria denotes a mild SUD, while four to five indicate a moderate SUD. Meeting six or seven criteria indicates a severe SUD. The criteria used to diagnose an SUD focus on the past twelve months and are as follows.

In the last year, has your child:

- 1 Taken drugs in larger amounts or for a longer period of time than intended?
- 2 Wanted or tried to cut down but found they couldn't?
- 3 Spent a lot of time obtaining, using and recovering from using drugs?
- 4 Experienced cravings for drugs?
- 5 Repeatedly neglected duties or gotten into trouble at home, work or school due to drug use?
- 6 Continued to use drugs despite social or interpersonal problems they caused?
- 7 Lost interest in activities they used to enjoy?
- 8 Found themselves in unsafe or unhealthy situations as a result of procuring or using drugs?
- 9 Continued to use drugs even though they caused physical or mental health problems?
- 10 Developed a tolerance so that more drugs were needed to get the same effects?
- 11 Experienced withdrawal symptoms when they stopped using drugs?

Whether an SUD is mild, moderate or severe, treatment can help end the substance abuse for good and help your child reclaim their life.



HOW DOES TREATMENT WORK?

Treatment works for most people who engage in it.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration stresses that a holistic treatment program offers the best possible outcomes of treatment. A holistic approach involves both traditional and complementary therapies.

Traditional therapies are research-based, tried-and-true therapies that help your child address a variety of issues and confront a number of false beliefs and negative thought patterns. Traditional therapies include cognitive-behavioral therapy, family therapy and motivational interviewing.

Complementary therapies are those which, on their own, are not effective for treating addiction. But when used along with conventional therapies, complementary therapies are widely known to improve treatment outcomes. Complementary therapies include art therapy, adventure therapy and meditation.



THE GOALS OF BOTH TYPES
OF THERAPY INCLUDE
HELPING YOUR CHILD TO
FIND PURPOSE AND MEANING
IN A LIFE OF SOBRIETY.

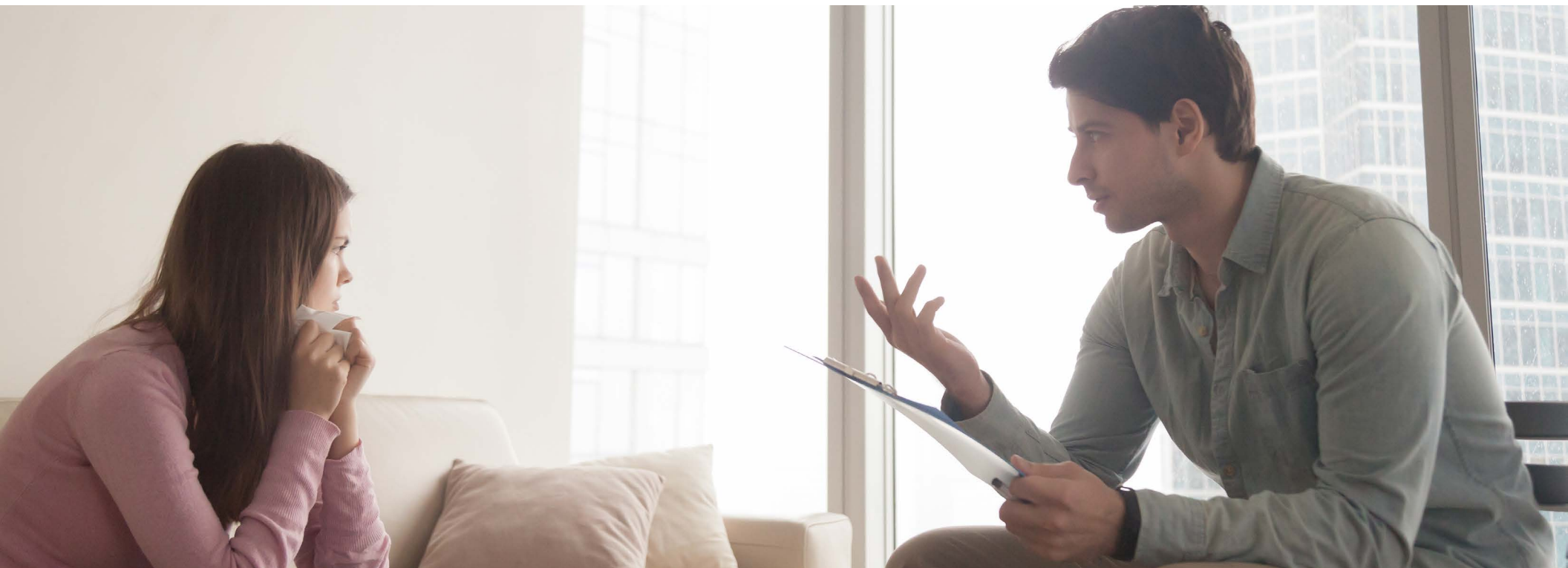
The Goals of Treatment Therapies

The goals of both types of therapy include helping your child:

- ◆ Identify their own, intrinsic reasons for wanting to recover
- ◆ Address and resolve the underlying issues behind the addiction
- ◆ Identify harmful thought and behavior patterns and engage in healthier ways of thinking and behaving
- ◆ Develop the skills and strategies needed to cope with stress, cravings, high-risk situations and other triggers
- ◆ Identify their strengths and improve their self-esteem and self-confidence
- ◆ Identify and set personal and attainable goals for the future
- ◆ Find ways to have fun and relax without drugs or alcohol
- ◆ Find purpose and meaning in a life of sobriety

A high-quality treatment program will strive to address all of the issues that can get in the way of successful recovery, including legal, medical, mental health, behavioral, educational and vocational needs.

An individualized treatment plan is essential for successful treatment. There are endless pathways to recovery, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Choosing the strategies and therapies that will work best for your child's unique needs and preferences is essential for keeping them engaged in treatment and for offering the best possible outcomes.



A photograph of a father and son in a park. The father, on the right, is bald with a light beard and is smiling while looking at his son. The son, on the left, has dark curly hair and is also smiling, looking back at his father. They are both wearing zip-up sweaters. The background is a soft-focus view of trees and a path in a park, with sunlight filtering through the leaves.

SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD

DURING TREATMENT



When your child enters treatment, the whole family enters recovery. Supporting your child during addiction treatment is a matter of developing a keen understanding of addiction and addressing the health of the family system.

Here are the essential steps for supporting your child during treatment.

- ◆ **Learn all you can about addiction, recovery and relapse.**
Understanding how addiction develops, progresses and relapses is crucial for helping your child recover. While he's in treatment, learn everything you can about addiction. Understand the challenges your child will face in recovery, and know how relapse occurs. Know what to do if your child lapses or relapses.

**SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD DURING ADDICTION
TREATMENT IS A MATTER OF DEVELOPING
A KEEN UNDERSTANDING OF ADDICTION
AND ADDRESSING THE HEALTH OF THE
FAMILY SYSTEM.**

- ◆ **Get support.** A support group like Al-Anon for parents or Ala-Teen for other children in the household will offer numerous benefits and will help you better support your child during and after treatment. Support groups offer a place to vent difficult emotions, ask questions, celebrate milestones and exchange tips, resources and advice with other people going through the same thing.

Support groups reduce feelings of fear, isolation and uncertainty and promote feelings of hopefulness. They offer important emotional support during tense or frustrating times.

- ◆ **Talk to a therapist.** It's likely that without realizing it, you and other family members may be engaging in enabling and codependent behaviors, such as removing consequences, making excuses for your child and letting their moods and problems affect the state of the household.

These behaviors don't automatically end when your child enters treatment, and addressing them is crucial for supporting your child in the best way possible after treatment. A therapist can help you and other family members identify and correct your own unhealthy thought and behavior patterns associated with the addiction.





- ◆ **Engage with family therapy.** Addiction takes a major toll on your relationships. Spouses may have differing ideas about how to deal with the addiction, and this can cause friction in the relationship. So can spending all of your available mental energy worrying about your child.

Other children in the home may withdraw or begin acting out. Communication between family members may break down. Feelings of resentment, guilt, anger and shame may dominate the home. Addressing these issues in family therapy can help restore function and order to the family system and help you begin the process of repairing and improving your relationship with your child.



TO TELL OR NOT TO TELL
FRIENDS AND FAMILY?

**ADDICTION SHOULD BE
VIEWED AS A MEDICAL ISSUE
AND NOT A MORAL FAILING.**

Whether you tell friends and family that your child is in treatment is entirely up to you. Doing so can free you from having to lie or make excuses, and it can expand your child's net of support early in their recovery. It also broadens your own support system.

However, in some social circles, addiction carries great stigma, and it can be a source of shame and anxiety for a family. If telling friends or family about your child's addiction will be more harmful than helpful, a therapist or support group can help you cope with any additional stress that may come with trying to hide it.

In many social circles, though, the stigma of addiction has been all but erased, and indeed, addiction should be viewed as a medical issue and not a moral failing, just as diabetes and heart disease are not considered moral failings even though they're often caused by unhealthy choices.



SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD

AFTER TREATMENT



It's exciting when your child comes home from treatment, but it's also a little scary. Did treatment work? Will your child be different? Will they stay sober? What can you do to help ensure their success?

If you've learned about addiction, engaged in therapy and joined a support group, you'll know what to expect and how to go about supporting your child in a variety of ways. These tips will help.

- ♦ **Set clear boundaries.** Let your child know exactly what is and what is not acceptable behavior at home. Structure and routine are extremely important in early recovery, and so is a high level of self-care.

Let your child know what the expectations are and what the consequences are for not following through. Some things you might consider are a curfew, getting your child up at a reasonable time each day, expecting them to pitch in around the house and limiting the time they spend locked in their room.

QUALITY TIME TOGETHER
WILL HELP YOU REPAIR
AND IMPROVE YOUR
RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR
CHILD AND RESTORE TRUST
ON BOTH SIDES.

- ◆ **Spend quality time with your child.** According to a study published in the *Journal of Addictive Behaviors*, parents can have considerable influence over whether their child engages in drug use.⁴

Experts agree that one of the best ways to keep your child off drugs is to spend plenty of quality time together. Play games, have lively conversations about the things that interest your child or binge-watch a Netflix series together. It doesn't really matter what you're doing, as long as you're together and enjoying each other's company.

Quality time together will help you repair and improve your relationship with your child and restore trust on both sides, and this can go a long way toward preventing relapse.

- ◆ **Make your home a drug-free zone.** Don't allow drugs or alcohol into your home, period. If you or anyone in your household is taking prescription medications that have a high potential for abuse, keep them locked up. These may include stimulants like Adderall or Ritalin, benzodiazepines like Klonopin or Xanax or opioid painkillers like OxyContin or Vicodin.
- ◆ **Encourage healthy lifestyle habits.** Good self-care is extremely important in recovery, and exercise and good nutrition offer important benefits that promote abstinence. Exercise improves mood, reduces stress and cravings and increases the quality of sleep. Good nutrition also impacts mood and sleep, and it promotes overall good health and mental clarity.

- ◆ **Have fun.** It's important for your child to have fun and enjoy life without drugs. Make sure your child has plenty of healthy recreational opportunities with friends. Encourage them to join a club or team. Allow them to invite non-using friends over for a movie or just to hang out. Make a point to have fun with your child, as well. Do things together that you both enjoy, such as shopping, going to the movies or sports events, making crafts or goofing around.
- ◆ **Help your child find purpose and meaning.** A sense of purpose and meaning in life is one of the best deterrents for relapse. Help your child find and participate in activities that interest them. Help them use their strengths and values in positive ways, such as by volunteering for a cause that interests them or finding a job that will promote self-confidence and self-efficacy.
- ◆ **Help your child set and reach goals.** Identifying and setting goals is an important part of treatment and recovery. Having goals to work toward and earning the satisfaction of achieving them improves the chances of successful long-term recovery.
- ◆ **Promote self-awareness and mindfulness.** Self-awareness and mindfulness are important in early recovery. It's important for your child to stay aware of their thought patterns, emotions and behaviors so that they can correct harmful ways of thinking and behaving before they become a problem. You don't need to go overboard, but every now and then, when it's appropriate, ask your child how they're feeling, encourage them to assess their thoughts and emotions and remind them to stay in the present moment instead of worrying about the past or future.



RELAPSE:
KNOW THE SIGNS, AND DON'T DESPAIR



Just as it takes time to develop an addiction, it takes time to re-learn healthy ways of thinking and behaving. Recovery is a process of change from the inside out, and it doesn't happen overnight.

A slip-up, also known as a lapse, is an instance of using once in recovery. A slip-up can lead to a relapse of the addiction, again characterized by compulsive drug use despite negative consequences.

Relapse rates for addiction are between 40 and 60 percent, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, which stresses that setbacks are a normal part of recovery.⁵ Rather than viewing a slip-up or relapse as a catastrophe, experts see it as an opportunity to determine the missing skills that led to it and develop those skills.

Signs of Relapse

Relapse occurs in three predictable stages, and each stage has specific signs and symptoms.

- ◆ **Emotional relapse.** During emotional relapse, the person is not consciously thinking about using again, but their attitudes and emotions are setting them up for a relapse. Signs of emotional relapse include bottling up emotions, neglecting self-care and focusing on others' problems or how others affect them.
- ◆ **Mental relapse.** During mental relapse, the person begins thinking about using again. At first, they're torn between using and staying sober. But as time moves on, they begin to glamorize past use and think about the people, places and things associated with their substance use. They begin lying to others, and they start thinking of ways to be able to control their use. Toward the end of mental relapse, they're looking for opportunities to use again and planning a relapse around their loved ones' schedules.
- ◆ **Physical relapse.** Physical relapse is where the lapse actually occurs. Whether this leads to a relapse of the addiction depends on how swift the intervention is.

What to Do if Your Child Relapses

If your child lapses or relapses, all is not lost. It doesn't mean that treatment didn't work. Stay calm, and contact your child's sponsor and/or aftercare case manager. Swift intervention will help your child get back on track with recovery quickly.

How your child views and approaches a slip-up or relapse can either make or break continued recovery. An article published in the *Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine* points out that a highly negative reaction, such as your child feeling like all is lost or experiencing intense feelings of shame, guilt or self-hatred, increases the chances that they'll give up on recovery altogether.⁶

Conversely, approaching a set-back with a positive attitude, always keeping in mind the successes your child has enjoyed so far, improves the chances that they'll further develop their sobriety skill set and become stronger and more motivated in their recovery.





**HOPE IS THE FOUNDATION
OF RECOVERY**



Throughout treatment and beyond, it's important to hold on to the hope for a better future for your child and instill that hope in them, as well. Hope, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, is the foundation of recovery. Hope is the belief that the challenges of recovery can be overcome.

Recovery is built on your child's strengths, talents, values and coping skills. It's a process of change that occurs via many pathways. The support of family and friends during your child's recovery will dramatically improve their chances of long-term success. Through supporting your child in recovery, you'll likely find that your own life is improved and enriched as well. Treatment works, and it can work for your child and for your family.

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