

Helping a loved one with an alcohol addiction

Seeing a loved one suffering with a drinking problem can be emotionally draining, and trying to help them can be even harder.

Approximately 7.7 million U.S. adults are currently married to or living with a partner with an alcohol use disorder, according to a study from the University at Buffalo Research Institute. The research highlights the considerable psychological distress that can be caused by living with an alcoholic partner.

“Alcoholism can be one of the most challenging psychiatric and social diseases to treat because of the broad availability of alcohol and the social acceptance of drinking,” says Dr. Aaron Malina, neuropsychologist at Advocate Good Shepherd Hospital in Barrington, Ill. “Alcoholism very much impacts not only the person drinking, but everyone in his or her social circle.”

Family and general social support is a key ingredient in establishing and maintaining sobriety with a loved one.

The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence offers these tips:

- **Learn All You Can About Alcoholism and Drug Dependence**
- **Speak Up and Offer Your Support** – Talk to the person about your concerns, including your willingness to go with them and get help. Like other chronic diseases, the earlier addiction is treated, the better.
- **Express Love and Concern** – Don’t wait for your loved one to “hit bottom.” You may be met with excuses, denial or anger, but be prepared to respond with specific examples of behavior that has you worried.
- **Don’t Expect the Person to Stop Without Help** – You have heard it before—promises to cut down or stop—but it doesn’t work. Treatment, support and new coping skills are needed to overcome addiction to alcohol and drugs.
- **Support Recovery as an Ongoing Process** – Once your friend or family member is receiving treatment or going to meetings, remain involved. While maintaining your own commitment to getting help, continue to support their participation in continuing care, meetings and recovery support groups.

To help others, family and friends need to take care of themselves. “Although others may not experience the direct effects of the alcohol, they can struggle with the psychological and social consequences of the person’s alcohol use at times as much, if not more than the person actively drinking,” Dr. Malina says. “If you or a loved one is struggling with alcoholism, reach out to your primary care physician, behavioral health provider or a support group.”

Wishing you joy and good health,
Mary Bohlen RN
SJParishNurse@comcast.net