



FAMILIES IN RECOVERY: SHARE EXPERIENCES TO SUPPORT RECOVERY



“MY STORY IS A DIFFERENT TYPE OF ADDICTION RECOVERY, BUT NOT OFTEN FIGURED INTO THE ADDICT’S RECOVERY. IT IS THE ADDICTION OF ENABLING MY ADDICTED CHILD.”

— FRANCES

THE ISSUE

When a family member has a mental and/or substance use disorder, the effects are felt by their immediate and extended family members. Family members may experience feelings of abandonment, anxiety, fear, anger, concern, embarrassment, or guilt. They may also wish to ignore or cut ties with a person misusing substances.¹ This is true for traditional families as well as non-traditional families, which may include stepchildren, same-sex couples, and individuals who consider or include their friends as their family unit. However, individuals and family members can find encouragement and hope through the recovery process and support each other on the path to healing.

Millions of family members are affected by mental and/or substance use disorders:

- An estimated 43.6 million individuals aged 18 or older had any mental illness in the past year.²
- An estimated 21.5 million individuals aged 12 or older were classified with a substance use disorder in the past year.³
- Approximately 7.9 million adults had co-occurring substance use disorder and any mental illness in the past year.⁴

When considering family recovery, it is also important to acknowledge the impact of growing up in a home where there may be dysfunction due to a

family member's mental and/or substance use disorder. With robust evidence indicating that genes influence both alcohol dependence and dependence on illicit drugs,⁵ generations within a family often have to navigate the learned behaviors of substance misuse, as well as the knowledge that their genetic makeup may put them at an increased risk for developing a mental and/or substance use disorder.⁶

To read more about unique challenges for military families and support services, please refer to the "Military, Veterans, and Military Families" section of this toolkit.

FINDING SUPPORT

Family members benefit from knowing they are not alone in helping loved ones through the recovery journey. They also need support, and self-care is critical. Individuals can focus on their well-being while caring for a loved one by:

- Joining a family support group to meet others experiencing similar challenges (resources below).
- Participating in family programs in which education and treatment sessions include loved ones.
- Attending individual therapy to learn appropriate coping skills.
- Eating healthy meals and getting adequate sleep.
- Managing stress by engaging in hobbies and getting exercise.
- Sharing their stories with the virtual recovery community and reading about others who have similar experiences. (Visit: www.recoverymonth.gov/personal-stories)

Research shows that families play a major role in helping to prevent mental and/or substance use disorders, identifying when someone has a problem,⁷ and connecting those in need with the treatment resources and services they need to begin and stay on their recovery journey.⁸

Families are in a unique position to recognize the signs and symptoms of a mental and/or substance use disorder in a loved one. For more information, visit the following resources:

- **Signs an Adult Loved One or Friend Has a Problem with Drugs:** www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/treatment/what-to-do-if-your-adult-friend-or-loved-one-has-problem-drugs
- **Signs a Teen or Young Adult Has a Problem with Drugs:** www.drugabuse.gov/related-topics/treatment/what-to-do-if-your-teen-or-young-adult-has-problem-drugs

- **Family Checkup: Positive Parenting Prevents Drug Abuse:** <https://www.drugabuse.gov/family-checkup>
- **Symptoms of an Alcohol Use Disorder:** rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/How-much-is-too-much/Whats-the-harm/What-Are-Symptoms-Of-An-Alcohol-Use-Disorder.aspx
- **Signs of a Mental Health Disorder:** www.mentalhealth.gov/what-to-look-for/index.html

Having actively involved family members can also promote positive behavioral health since family members monitor each other's behavior, take responsibility for each other's well-being, and can offer or recommend assistance and support.⁹

The idea of talking to a loved one about a mental illness or substance use disorder can seem overwhelming. However, understanding that the recovery journey is not a one-size-fits-all process and coming from a place of love and support can help a loved one accept help.

For tips on how to reach out and start the conversation, visit the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence's Family and Friends page at <https://ncadd.org/family-friends>.

PROMOTING RECOVERY

Families experiencing the recovery process can find strength and resiliency from other families and learn how to better support a loved one's recovery journey. As family members adjust to the emotions and stresses of caring for someone with a mental and/or substance use disorder, some of the best support often comes from others who are, or have been, in similar circumstances.¹⁰

Resources for family members who need support include:

- **Al-Anon Family Groups** (www.al-anon.alateen.org/): Offers the opportunity to learn from the experiences of others who have a loved one with an alcohol use/misuse disorder.
- **Mental Health America – Mental Illness and the Family: Recognizing Warning Signs and How to Cope** (www.mentalhealthamerica.net/recognizing-warning-signs): Provides information on how to recognize mental illness, along with other resources for people living with a mental illness or who know people living with mental illness.
- **National Alliance on Mental Illness Family Support Group** (<https://www.nami.org/Local-NAMI/Programs?classkey=72e2fdaf-2755-404f-a8be-606d4de63fdb>): Provides a peer-led support group for family members, caregivers, and loved ones of individuals living with mental illness.



IN 2014

MORE THAN 7.9 MILLION U.S. ADULTS AGED 18 AND OLDER (3.3%) HAD **CO-OCCURRING MENTAL ILLNESS AND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS.**

Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Behavioral Health Trends in the United States: Results from the 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, NSDUH Series H-50, HHS Publication No. (SMA) 15-4927. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2015, p. 33.

- **The 20 Minute Guide** (the20minuteguide.com/parents/#.VFqX-TTF9fe): Offers a set of interactive tools and strategies for any family member or friend who wants to help a loved one get help for a substance use disorder.
- **The Campaign to Change Direction** (www.changedirection.org/): Provides resources to individuals and communities who wish to “change the story” in America about mental health, mental illness, and wellness.
- **Faces & Voices of Recovery Guide to Mutual Aid Resources** (www.facesandvoicesofrecovery.org/guide/support/resources/fam_friend.html): Publishes the Guide to Mutual Aid Resources, including a list of resources for families and friends looking for mutual aid support groups.
- **Learn to Cope** (learn2cope.org/): Offers education, resources, peer support, and hope for parents and family members coping with a loved one addicted to opiates or other drugs.
- **National Association for Children of Alcoholics** (www.nacoa.org/aboutnacoa.htm): Provides resources to help support children and families affected by alcoholism and other drug dependencies.
- **Adult Children of Alcoholics World Service Organization** (www.adultchildren.org/): Offers the opportunity for men and women who grew up in alcoholic or otherwise dysfunctional homes to learn from the experiences of others and to practice their own recovery.
- **SAMHSA’s National Helpline, 1-800-662-HELP (4357) – or 1-800-487-4889 (TDD)** (www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline): Provides 24-hour, free, and confidential treatment referral and information about mental and/or substance use disorders, prevention, treatment, and recovery in English and Spanish.

- **The National Clearinghouse for Families and Youth** (ncfy.acf.hhs.gov/about/free-resources): Provides free information for communities, organizations, and individuals interested in developing new and effective strategies for supporting young people and their families.
- **The National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse** (<https://fatherhood.gov/>): Offers resources for fathers, practitioners, programs/federal grantees, states, and the public at-large who are serving or supporting strong fathers and families.

Family recovery involves providing essential support and becoming the champion of a loved one’s recovery; this is a reality for millions of Americans. The hope, help, and healing of family recovery is a powerful way to break the intergenerational cycle of mental and/or substance use disorders.

For more information, including **Recovery Month** resources for families and the community, public service announcements, events across the country, and social media tools, visit the **Recovery Month** website at www.recoverymonth.gov/.

This list is not exhaustive of all available resources. Inclusion of websites and resources in this document and on the **Recovery Month** website does not constitute official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services or the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.



¹ The Addiction Technology Transfer Center Network. (2008). Family participation in addiction treatment—Part 1: The importance of engagement. *Addiction Messenger*, 10 (1). Retrieved from www.nattc.org/userfiles/file/NorthwestFrontier/Vol.%2011%20Issue%201.pdf.

² Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Behavioral Health Trends in the United States: Results from the 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, NSDUH Series H-50, HHS Publication No. (SMA) 15-4927. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2015, p. 1.

³ Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Behavioral Health Trends in the United States: Results from the 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, NSDUH Series H-50, HHS Publication No. (SMA) 15-4927. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2015, p. 1.

⁴ Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Behavioral Health Trends in the United States: Results from the 2014 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, NSDUH Series H-50, HHS Publication No. (SMA) 15-4927. Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2015, p. 32.

⁵ Dickman, D.M., Agrawal, A. (2008), The Genetics of Alcohol and Other Drug Dependence. *Alcohol Research & Health*, 31, No. 2: 111–118.

⁶ National Institute on Drug Abuse. DrugFacts: Genetics and Epigenetics of Addiction. Retrieved from: <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/genetics-epigenetics-addiction>

⁷ Velleman, R. D. B., Templeton, L. J. and Copello, A. G. (2005), The role of the family in preventing and intervening with substance use and misuse: a comprehensive review of family interventions, with a focus on young people. *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 24: 93–109. doi: 10.1080/09595230500167478.

⁸ Center for Substance Abuse Treatment. Substance Abuse Treatment and Family Therapy. Rockville (MD): Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (US); 2004. (Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP) Series, No. 39.) Chapter 1 Substance Abuse Treatment and Family Therapy. Available from: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK64269/.

⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Promoting Individual, Family, and Community Connectedness to Prevent Suicidal Behavior. Retrieved from: www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/Suicide_Strategic_Direction_Full_Version-a.pdf.

¹⁰ American Psychological Association. How to Cope When a Loved One Has a Mental Illness. Retrieved from: www.apa.org/helpcenter/serious-mental-illness.aspx.