



You're Not Alone: A Guide for Families Navigating Substance Use Disorder & Recovery

UNDERSTANDING STIGMA: A FAMILY PERSPECTIVE

Substance use disorder is one of the most heavily stigmatized health conditions—and that stigma doesn't just affect the individual struggling.

Family members often experience deep feelings of guilt, shame, embarrassment, and may feel isolated or unable to talk openly about their loved one's addiction. This emotional weight can create barriers to seeking support—for themselves or for the person they care about.

But here's the truth: Stigma is a barrier to healing. It stops people from asking for help. It silences families. It reinforces shame.

We must change the conversation. When we treat substance use disorder as the medical condition it truly is, we remove barriers to treatment and open doors to compassion, care, and recovery.

Let's lead with understanding, not judgment. Let's make it safe to seek help—for your loved one and for you. You are not alone. There is support. There is hope.

STAGES OF COPING WHEN A LOVED ONE HAS A SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER



Search

Begin seeking answers for the changes you're seeing in your loved one. You may question what's going on, look for alternative explanations, or hold onto hope that substance use isn't the cause. This stage often includes asking questions—and sometimes accepting answers that don't feel complete.



Deny

Struggle to accept that substance use is occurring—or minimize the severity of the problem. You may grieve the loss of hopes and dreams once held for your loved one. This stage is often filled with many emotions: frustration, anger (toward yourself or your loved one), guilt for not seeing it sooner, fear of what lies ahead.



Accept

Acknowledge that substance use is the cause of the changes you've seen in your loved one. While you can offer love, guidance, and support, your loved one must take the steps toward recovery themselves. You also begin to understand an important truth: Acceptance does not mean accepting unacceptable behaviors.



Learn

Learn about substance use disorder—its nature, risk factors, and the resources available to support the family. This stage involves gaining insight and perspective. You start to recognize the difference between your loved one's true self and the behaviors driven by their substance use.

HOW TO USE NARCAN®

By receiving training in administering the FDA approved opioid overdose reversal medication Narcan® (Naloxone), families can be better equipped to prevent the death of a loved one. Narcan is safe, easy to use, and will have no effect on someone who is not experiencing an opioid overdose. It is also safe for children and pregnant women in emergency overdose situations. In an overdose emergency, if expired naloxone is all that's available, you should use it. It may still be effective and is unlikely to cause harm.

1. Check for Signs of Overdose



- Unconsciousness
- Slow or no breathing
- Blue or gray lips and fingertips
- Gurgling or choking sounds
- No response to shouting or rubbing the chest

2. Call 911



Even if Narcan is used, medical help is still necessary.

3. Lay Them on Their Back



If they are not already.

4. Administer Narcan



Hold the device with your thumb on the bottom of the plunger and two fingers on either side of the nozzle. Gently insert the tip into one nostril until your fingers touch their nose. No need to tilt the head.

5. Watch and Wait



If the person doesn't respond within 2–3 minutes, give a second dose.

Perform rescue breathing or CPR if trained.

6. Stay Until Help Arrives

They may wake up confused or agitated—stay calm and reassure them.

EDUCATION

Education and training can play a powerful role in helping family members navigate the challenges of substance use disorder. When equipped with accurate and accessible information, families are better able to support their loved one's treatment and recovery journey—while also caring for their own emotional well-being.

Important topics include understanding the nature of substance use disorder, recognizing risk factors, identifying signs of quality treatment, and exploring available recovery options. Equally vital are learning how to set healthy boundaries, practice self-care, and recognize the impact of stigma—both from others and within ourselves. Staying informed helps replace fear with understanding and uncertainty with hope.



Scan for resources for you and your loved ones.



Scan for local AI-Anon Meetings near you.

LEARN ADDICTION TERMINOLOGY

Language matters, especially when a condition is as stigmatized as substance use disorder. The Addictionary® is a glossary that can help family members identify stigmatizing words and offer alternative non-stigmatizing language.



Scan to visit the Recovery Research Institute Addictionary®.

WE'RE HERE TO HELP

Providence House provides comprehensive substance use disorder treatment through two specialized facilities: a men's residential center and a women's residential center. Our women's program is uniquely equipped to support pregnant and parenting women, offering trauma-informed care in a safe, structured environment where mothers can reside with their children. Both programs are designed to meet individuals where they are in their recovery journey, integrating evidence-based practices, individual and group counseling, peer support, and recovery-focused case management. Our goal is to promote long-term stability, healing, and reintegration into the community.



Scan to visit our website.

Men's Facility: 701-586-3300
Women's Facility: 701-838-3300