

Guidelines for Family Members of Chemically Dependent Individuals

One of the first questions that family members often ask themselves and others is:
“How do I help?”

Generally speaking, simple things are important. Take Communication. The need to talk to each other is essential, but often family members don't know what to say to each other. The realization that it doesn't really matter how perfectly you say something allows the individual the freedom to take the risk of saying the wrong thing and to just start communicating.

Attitude is also important. Understanding that chemical dependency is a disease provides a core survival principle for not only the recovering individual, but also the family member. Remembering that the loved one has the same amount of control over their disease of alcoholism or addiction as a diabetic has over their disease of diabetes allows surrender of control. Knowing that as in diabetes, there is treatment and a course of recovery in addiction is a relief and provides hope.

Other guidelines for family members that can strengthen the relationship during the arduous journey of recovery include:

- View alcoholism/chemical dependency as a disease and not a family or social disgrace.
- Know that recovery can and does happen.
- Avoid nagging, lecturing or “preaching”.
- Avoid acting like a martyr.
- Do not try to control the loved one's behavior with “if you loved me...”.
- Be careful to guard against feelings of jealousy or feeling left out because of the method of recovery that the loved one chooses.
- Know that love, home and family are not enough to support abstinence from substance abuse.
- Support responsible behavior in the loved one.
- Begin to accept, understand and to live “One Day At A Time”.
- Learn about the use of substances and what role it plays in an individual's life and what role you have played in the life of the substance abuser.
- Participate in your own support group – possibly a 12 Step program such as Al-Anon.
- **Recognize and accept that whatever you have been doing has not worked and it is time to learn new behaviors and a new lifestyle.**