



UNDERSTANDING SUBSTANCE USE

A Guide for Families

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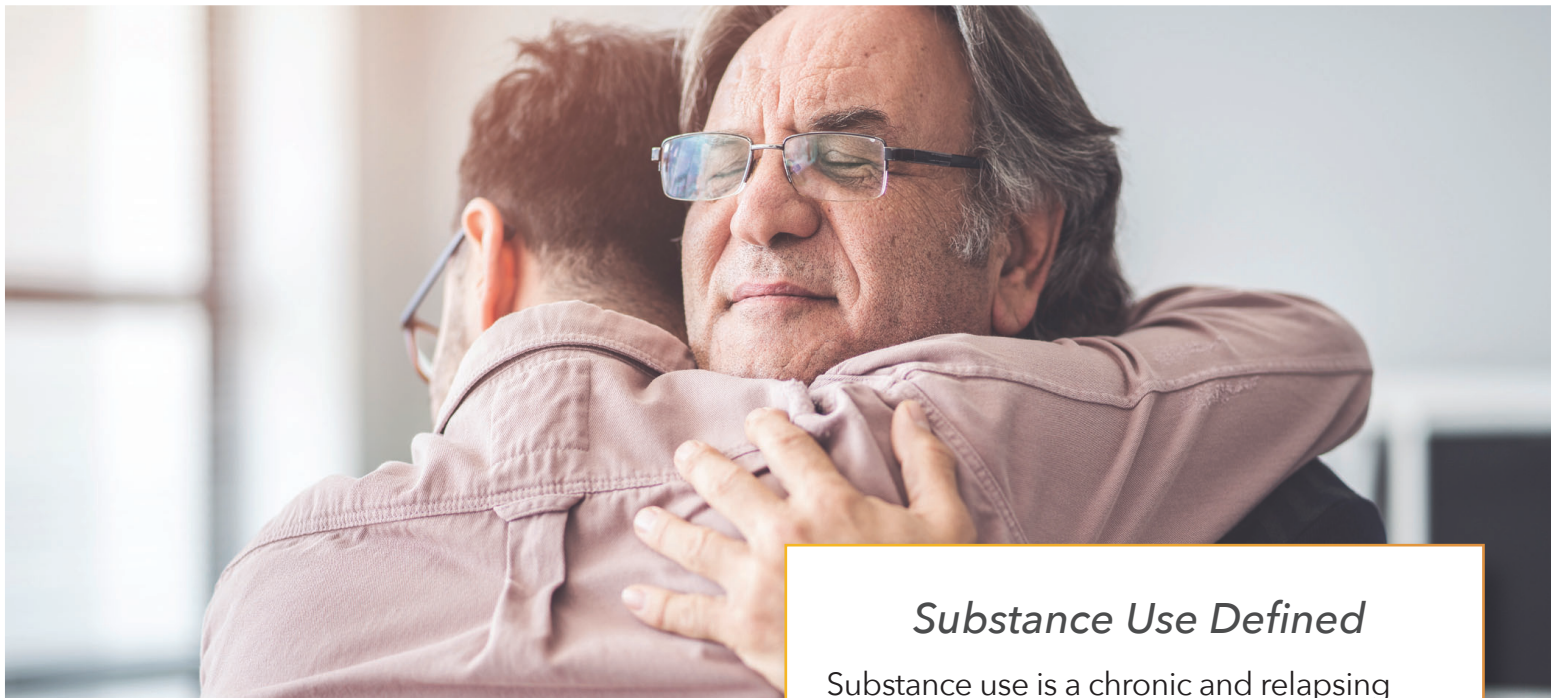


North Central Health Care
Person centered. Outcome focused.

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Substance use is complex and challenging. It has far-reaching consequences, that affects not only the person struggling with it but also their closest family and friends. However, recovery IS possible with the right support and treatment. By understanding substance use, recognizing its signs, and offering compassionate support, families can play a crucial role in helping their loved ones on the path to recovery. Remember that seeking professional guidance and assistance is often the most effective way to address substance use. This comprehensive booklet aims to provide valuable insights and knowledge, enabling families to gain a deeper understanding of substance use, its intricate development, and most importantly, how they can play a pivotal role in guiding their loved ones towards the path of recovery. We recognize that substance use is not just a solitary struggle; it is a collective battle where the support and understanding of family members can make a profound difference in the recovery journey. In the following pages, we will explore substance use in its various dimensions, offering practical guidance and empowering families to become essential pillars of strength and hope in the face of this complex challenge.

Substance Use Defined

Substance use is a chronic and relapsing brain disease characterized by the compulsive use of substances or engaging in behaviors despite negative consequences. It is often associated with a loss of control over the substance or behavior, cravings, and an inability to stop using or engaging in the behavior, even when it causes harm.

Causes of Substance Use

Substance use typically develops over time and involves a combination of factors, including:

GENETICS: Some individuals may have a genetic predisposition to substance use, making them more vulnerable to developing it when exposed to certain substances or behaviors.

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS: A person's environment, including family, friends, and community, can play a significant role in the development of substance use. Exposure to substance use or addictive behaviors can increase the risk.

MENTAL HEALTH: Co-occurring mental health disorders, such as depression, anxiety, or trauma, can contribute to substance use. People may use substances to self-medicate or cope with emotional pain.

SOCIAL AND PEER PRESSURE: Social influences and peer pressure can lead individuals to experiment with substances or behaviors that can become addictive.

NEUROLOGICAL CHANGES: Repeated substance use or engaging in addictive behaviors can lead to changes in the brain's reward and pleasure centers, making it difficult to control cravings and compulsive use.

FAMILY RESOURCES & SUPPORTS

Comprehensive Substance use Resources in Marathon County

Marathon County recognizes the significant impact that substance use can have on families and communities. Fortunately, there are a variety of resources available to support families dealing with substance use-related challenges. These resources are lifelines for those grappling with the impact of substance use disorders, alcoholism, and other addictive behaviors within their families. The county understands that each family's journey is unique, and, as a result, offers a diverse range of services tailored to meet different needs. Whether you're seeking education, counseling, or support groups, the following resources can help families heal, recover, and rebuild their lives in the face of substance use's challenges.

North Central Health Care

Website: norcen.org

Phone: (715) 848-4600

NCHC offers a wide range of behavioral health services, including substance use treatment and counseling. They provide support for individuals and families affected by substance use, offering a holistic approach to recovery.

Marathon County Health Dept.

Website: MarathonCounty.gov

Phone: (715) 261-1900

The Marathon County Health Department offers educational resources and programs related to substance use prevention and treatment. They provide information on local support services and can guide families to appropriate resources.

SAMHSA

Website: SAMHSA.gov

Phone: (800) 662-HELP (4357)

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is the agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) that leads public health efforts to advance the behavioral health of the nation and to improve the lives of individuals living with mental and substance use disorders, and their families.

Al-Anon Family Groups

Website: Al-Anon.org

Phone: 1-888-425-2666

Al-Anon is a support group specifically designed for families and friends of individuals struggling with alcohol substance use. They offer meetings in Marathon County and online, providing a safe space to share experiences and coping strategies.

Nar-Anon Family Groups

Website: Nar-Anon.org

Phone: (800) 477-6291

Nar-Anon is a support group for families and friends of individuals dealing with narcotics substance use. Meetings are available both in-person and online, offering support, understanding, and hope.

MC AOD Partnership

Website: AODPartnership.org

Phone: (715) 261-1980

A community alliance leading education, awareness and prevention initiatives to reduce substance abuse to reduce the impact of substance abuse in Marathon County.

Online Communities/Forums

Numerous online forums and social media groups exist where families can connect, share experiences, and offer support to one another. (Reddit's "r/AlAnon" and "r/NarAnon")

SMART Recovery Family & Friends

Phone: (440) 951-5357

SMART Recovery Family & Friends is a science-based program that provides tools and support for family members dealing with substance use. They offer online meetings and resources to help families cope and promote healthy interactions.

NAMI Northwoods

Website: NamiNorthwoods.org

Phone: (800) 950-NAMI (6264)

NAMI Northwoods is a non-profit organization that provides support, education and advocacy throughout the Marathon, Lincoln and Langlade counties in Wisconsin on behalf of individuals and families affected by mental illness.

Marathon County 211

Website: 211.org

Phone: 211

Dialing 211 in Marathon County can connect you to a wide range of community resources, including substance use treatment, counseling, and support groups. This is a valuable resource for accessing local services.

CREATING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

Empowering Recovery Through Clear Guidelines and Compassion

In recovery, establishing boundaries is essential.

Common recovery boundaries may include things like maintaining a substance-free home, respecting personal space, defining financial limits, setting emotional boundaries, and establishing communication guidelines within the family. While resistance may be expected, it's crucial to stay firm yet compassionate when enforcing these boundaries, as they are designed to create a healthier environment. Seeking professional guidance from a therapist or counselor specializing in substance use and family dynamics can offer valuable support when needed. Setting and maintaining these boundaries is an act of love and support, fostering a positive and respectful environment that encourages recovery and growth. Remember that ongoing communication and adjustments are necessary as the situation evolves.

The Significance of Healthy Boundaries

Preventing Relapse: Boundaries can help individuals avoid triggers and high-risk situations that may lead to relapse. By clearly defining what is and isn't acceptable, they can steer clear of circumstances that threaten their recovery.

Maintaining Self-Esteem: Healthy boundaries are a reflection of self-respect. By enforcing these limits, individuals communicate their worth and set the stage for respectful treatment from others.

Promoting Emotional Health: Boundaries can protect emotional well-being by preventing others from taking advantage or causing emotional harm. It's essential for individuals in recovery to maintain their emotional stability and self-esteem.

Strengthening Relationships: Setting boundaries doesn't just protect the individual but also promotes healthier relationships. Clear boundaries allow both parties to understand and respect each other's needs and limits, leading to more respectful and fulfilling connections.

How to Set Healthy Boundaries

Self-Reflection: Take time to reflect on your feelings, needs, and limits. Understand what you are comfortable with and what makes you feel uneasy.

Clearly Define Boundaries: Be specific and clear about your boundaries. Use "I" statements to express your needs and limits without blaming or accusing. (Example: "I need to have a quiet and drug-free home environment.")

Consistency: Consistency is key in maintaining boundaries. Stick to your boundaries even when faced with resistance or emotional manipulation.

Set Consequences: Establish consequences for violating boundaries, and be prepared to follow through with them. Consequences should be reasonable and related to the boundary. (Example: "If drugs are brought into our home, I will need to ask you to leave.")

Seek Support: Discuss and coordinate boundaries with other family members. Consistency among family members is crucial for success.

Practice Self-Care: Taking care of your own well-being is essential. Setting boundaries may evoke strong emotions, so make self-care a priority.



SUBSTANCE USE & FAMILY

How Loved Ones Cope

The repercussions of substance use extend far beyond the individual, touching every aspect of their life. The emotional toll on families is undeniable, with loved ones experiencing feelings of anger, frustration, guilt, and helplessness as they watch their family member's life spiral out of control. Witnessing the pain and suffering of someone they care about can be emotionally draining, leading to anxiety, depression, and emotional distress within the family unit. The constant fear for the well-being of a loved one can create a pervasive sense of unease and anxiety that takes a toll on everyone involved.

Furthermore, substance use can erode trust within families and relationships. Loved ones may have been lied to, deceived, or stolen from due to the need to support the substance use, leading to a profound sense of betrayal and strained relationships. Financial difficulties often accompany substance use as well, as the cost of sustaining an substance use can create significant financial strain, leaving families struggling to make ends meet.

In addition to these challenges, codependent relationships can develop within families, where



enabling behaviors may inadvertently support the substance use. This codependency can be a barrier to both the individual's recovery and the overall health of the family. As a result, family members may experience caregiver burnout and neglect their own health and well-being, leading to health problems caused by the ongoing stress and emotional turmoil associated with substance use.

Social isolation and the weight of societal stigma further compound the difficulties faced by families. They may feel judged or blamed for their loved one's struggles, causing further emotional distress and a sense of hopelessness.

"Amidst these challenges, there is hope and help."

However, amidst these challenges, there is hope and help available. Families can educate themselves about substance use, join support groups, establish healthy boundaries, and seek professional help. With the right support and resources, families can overcome the complex and far-reaching impact of substance use, finding hope and healing on the path to recovery for both their loved ones and themselves.

SUPPORT THROUGH RECOVERY

Strategies, Insights, and Compassion for Families and Friends

Be it to substances or behaviors, substance use is a disease that knows no boundaries. Understanding that **it's not a moral failing but a complex interplay of factors** is crucial. Supporting a loved one through substance use is a delicate balance between helping without enabling, setting boundaries without pushing away, and encouraging treatment without imposing. Learning to navigate this path with care, understanding, and love, will ensure your ability to offer steadfast support in your loved one's journey to recovery.



11 ESSENTIAL STEPS TO SUPPORT YOUR LOVED ONE

EDUCATE YOURSELF: Understanding substance use and its challenges is a foundational step in providing support. It allows you to recognize the signs and dynamics of substance use, ultimately helping you empathize with your loved one's journey.

BE PATIENT: Recognize the importance of patience in the often long and challenging recovery journey. Remember that progress may be slow, but your unwavering support can make all the difference.

ENCOURAGE TREATMENT: Advocate for professional help as a crucial step in recovery. Your guidance and support can make a significant difference in their decision to seek treatment.

SELF-CARE: Prioritize your own well-being to be a stable presence for your loved one. Taking care of yourself ensures you have the strength to continue providing essential support.

CELEBRATE ACHIEVEMENTS: Positive reinforcement and encouragement motivate and boost confidence. Celebrating even small victories can be a reminder of progress and a source of inspiration.

HAVE AN EMERGENCY PLAN: Being prepared for crises is essential for providing immediate support. Your readiness can ensure that your loved one receives the care they need in critical situations.

SET BOUNDARIES: Maintain a healthy dynamic while addressing substance use's negative impact. Clear boundaries can help your loved one understand the consequences of their actions.

SHOW UNCONDITIONAL LOVE: Offer unwavering support and empathy without judgment. Unconditional love is a powerful motivator for change and healing.

PROMOTE A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE: Encourage a balanced lifestyle with exercise, nutrition, and stress management. By emphasizing the importance of physical and mental well-being, you can contribute to your loved one's overall recovery.

SUPPORT GROUPS: Consider joining a support group to connect with others facing similar challenges. Sharing experiences and advice with those who understand can provide comfort and valuable insights for your journey of support.

OPEN COMMUNICATION: Create an open and caring atmosphere for honest two-way communication. By actively listening and offering non-judgmental support, you can foster a stronger bond and better understanding.

RECOGNIZING SIGNS OF RELAPSE

Relapse is a common and challenging aspect of substance use recovery. It's important to remember that relapse is not a sign of failure but a common part of the process. Recognizing warning signs early can offer the opportunity for intervention and support. If you notice relapse behaviors in your loved one, it's crucial to approach the situation with empathy and open communication. Encourage them to seek help, reconnect with their support network, and reinforce the importance of their recovery goals. Early intervention can make a significant difference in preventing a full relapse and helping your loved one continue their path to a healthier, substance use-free life.

Common warning signs of relapse

Common warning signs of relapse in substance use recovery encompass a range of behavioral and emotional shifts. Isolation, for instance, serves as a critical indicator. When individuals begin **withdrawing from their social networks**, disconnecting from friends, family, and support groups, it reflects emotional or psychological challenges. This isolation can create a void, making it easier for substance use to regain a foothold, as the emotional connections essential for effective recovery wane. Encouraging open communication and helping them reconnect with their support network becomes crucial in addressing this issue and preventing relapse.

Another key warning sign is the **loss of accountability**. Accountability is a foundational element of substance use recovery. When individuals start neglecting their commitment to their recovery plan and sobriety goals, it can signal a concerning shift in their dedication. They may become complacent, less diligent in attending therapy or support group meetings, or slack off on the self-improvement goals they initially set. Maintaining accountability and diligence in recovery is pivotal to its success, and any decline in these areas should be a cause for concern.

Emotional distress is also a significant relapse risk sign in recovery, marked by heightened anxiety, depression, irritability, or anger, signifying internal struggles. These emotions can act as triggers, potentially leading to a return to addictive substances or behaviors. Expressions of hopelessness or declining motivation further pose a risk to sobriety. To address these challenges and sustain recovery, emotional support, therapy, and open communication are essential.

Neglecting self-care is another warning sign. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is a cornerstone of successful recovery. When individuals in recovery begin to overlook self-care, it can raise concerns about their commitment to staying sober. This neglect may manifest as poor eating habits, lack of exercise, disrupted sleep patterns, or a general disregard for physical and mental well-being. A decline in self-care can signify a shift in focus away from sustaining their recovery, underscoring the importance of reiterating the value of a healthy lifestyle within the context of ongoing sobriety.



Financial troubles often emerge as a byproduct of substance use, with financial resources redirected to sustain the addictive behavior. When someone in recovery faces financial problems, it may be attributed to the significant costs associated with acquiring the substance or engaging in addictive behaviors. This financial strain can serve as a red flag, indicating a potential return to substance use or a susceptibility to relapse. Changes in financial behavior, such as borrowing money, selling possessions, or displaying unusual spending patterns, should be closely monitored as potential indicators of a looming relapse.

Another concerning warning sign for individuals in recovery is **associating with triggers**. Triggers encompass people, places, or situations that provoke cravings or evoke memories of substance use or addictive behaviors. When individuals reconnect with old friends still engaged in such behaviors, they place themselves at risk of relapse. This association increases the likelihood of exposure to substances or behaviors that can reignite cravings and weaken their resolve. Recognizing and addressing this behavior becomes critical for safeguarding sobriety and ensuring a successful recovery journey.

NOTE: The warning signs mentioned are not exhaustive as substance use is a highly individualized journey with a wide range of potential indicators. Staying vigilant for any unusual behaviors and maintaining open communication within a strong support system is crucial for early detection.