

What happens in a family when one member has a drug or drinking problem? Everyone in the family is affected in one way or another, and everyone can help determine whether the situation gets worse or better.

Everyone's Problem

You might think that a drug or alcohol problem belongs to the person who is drinking or taking drugs. But if someone you love has a problem, you probably do, too. Because you love them, the way they act affects how you feel, and may affect how you behave. Perhaps you have felt suspicious about "where the money is going," or angry and disappointed when someone's intoxication caused long-awaited activities to be cancelled. You may have covered up when someone missed an appointment, broke a promise or couldn't go to school or work.

Physical or sexual abuse might even be present. Perhaps you wish the "problem person" would change, and fear for the whole family if the problem continues. But, believe it or not, your best chance for rebuilding a happy family life is to start by changing yourself.

Harmful "Help"

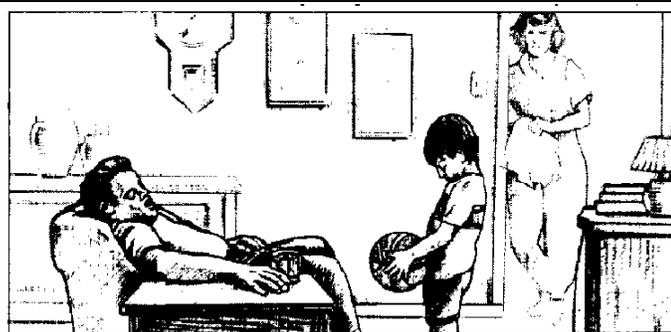
Many times, whole families have unintentionally made it easier for the abuser to rely on drink or other drugs.



This is called enabling, and it is often done with the best of intentions. Here are some examples of enabling:

- Denying that there is a problem, or dismissing the problem as a small one.
- Taking over the abuser's responsibilities.
- Rescuing the abuser from the consequences of his or her drug use, such as by "calling in sick" or lending money.
- Reinforcing drug use by participating in occasions where it is used.

All of these behaviors allow the abuser to keep using drink or other drugs in destructive ways and hurt the enablers as well.



One family member with a drug problem can affect the whole family's feelings and behaviors.

Suggested Steps

If someone in your family has a drug or alcohol problem, here are some suggested courses of action:

- Learn more about the drug being used, and about drug abuse patterns. Chemical dependency is not caused by lack of willpower or moral decay. It is a treatable disease.
- Get help for yourself from a health professional who specializes in chemical dependency issues. Ask your employee assistance program for a referral, or look in the yellow pages under "drug abuse" or alcoholism.
- Join a self-help group for families of drug abusers, such as Al-Anon, Coke-Anon, or Nar-Anon.
- Stop rescuing the abuser from the consequences of his or her actions.
- Work with a health professional to plan a way to intervene in your family member's drug use. Get him or her into treatment and build healthier family habits for the future.
- Take good care of yourself, and expect a difficult period. Becoming a drug-free family takes time and patience.

©1989 PARLAY INTERNATIONAL