

How to Help Someone with an Alcohol Addict

When is it considered alcoholism?

Watching a family member, friend, or coworker with an alcohol use disorder can be difficult. You might wonder what you can do to change the situation, and whether or not the person even wants your help.

Alcoholism is a term used to describe someone with an alcohol use disorder. Someone with alcoholism has both a physical and psychological dependence on alcohol. They may have problems controlling their drinking habits or choose to keep drinking even though it causes problems. These problems may interfere with their professional and social relationships or even their own health.

An alcohol use disorder can range from mild to severe. Mild patterns may develop into more serious complications. Early treatment and intervention can help people with alcohol use disorder. While it's up to the person to willingly start their sobriety journey, you can also help. Read on for some steps you can take to help your friend, family member, or loved one.

How to approach someone with alcohol use disorder

Step 1. Learn about alcohol use disorder

Before you do anything, it's important to know whether your friend or loved one has an alcohol addiction. Alcohol use disorder, or alcoholism, is more than just drinking too much from time to time. Sometimes alcohol as coping mechanism or social habit may look like alcoholism, but it's not the same. People with alcohol use disorder don't drink in moderation, even if they say they're only having one drink. To learn more, read about [alcoholism and its symptoms](#).

There are also government and program websites for further resources and information on helping someone with an alcohol addiction. Explore them to learn more about the addiction and experience:

- [Al-Anon](#)
- [Alcoholics Anonymous](#)
- [SAMHSA](#)
- [National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism](#)

Step 2. Practice what you're going to say

Let the person you care for know that you're available and that you care. Try to formulate statements that are positive and supportive. Avoid being negative, hurtful, or presumptuous.

Using "I" statements reduces accusation and lets you be an active participant in the discussion. It may be helpful to bring up a specific concern. You may mention when alcohol caused an unwanted effect, such as violent behavior or economic problems. Rather than saying, "You're an alcoholic — you need to get help now," you can say, "I love you and you're very important to me. I'm concerned about how much you're drinking, and it may be harming your health."

Prepare yourself for every response. No matter the reaction, you should stay calm and assure your person that they have your respect and support.

Step 3: Pick the right time and place

Choose the right time to have this important conversation. Have the conversation in a place where you know you'll have quiet and privacy. You'll also want to avoid any interruptions so that you both have each other's full attention. Make sure your person is not upset or preoccupied with other issues. Most importantly, the person should be sober.

Step 4: Approach and listen with honesty and compassion

If the person does have an alcohol problem, the best thing you can do is be open and honest with them about it. Hoping the person will get better on their own won't change the situation.

Tell your loved one that you're worried they're drinking too much, and let them know you want to be supportive. Be prepared to face a negative reaction. Try to roll with any resistance to your suggestions. The person may be in denial, and they may even react angrily to your attempts. Do not take it personally. Give them time and space to make an honest decision, and listen to what they have to say.

Step 5: Offer your support

Realize that you can't force someone who doesn't want to go into treatment. All you can do is offer your help. It's up to them to decide if they'll take it. Be nonjudgmental, empathetic, and sincere. Imagine yourself in the same situation and what your reaction might be.

Your friend or loved one may also vow to cut back on their own. However, actions are more important than words. Urge the person to get into a formal treatment program. Ask for concrete commitments and then follow up on them.

You may also want to see if other family members and friends want to be involved. This can depend on several factors, such as how serious the situation is or how private the person may be.

Step 6: Intervene

Approaching someone to discuss your concerns is different from an intervention. An [intervention](#) is more involved. It involves planning, giving consequences, sharing, and presenting a treatment option.

An intervention may be the course of action if the person is very resistant to getting help. During this process, friends, family members, and co-workers get together to confront the person and urge them into treatment. Interventions are often done with the help of a professional counselor. A professional therapist can:

- give advice on how to get the person into treatment
- explain what treatment options there are
- find programs in your area

Some agencies and organizations offer treatments at no cost.

How to support your loved one through their journey

Treatment of alcohol use disorder is an ongoing process. Don't consider your part done after your friend or family member is in therapy. If they are open to it, attend meetings with them. Offer to help out with work, childcare, and household tasks if they get in the way of treatment sessions.

Standing by your friend or family member's progress during and after treatment is important, too. For example, alcohol is everywhere. Even after recovery, your person will be in situations they can't predict. Ways you can help include avoiding alcohol when you're together or opting out of drinking in social situations. Ask about new strategies that they learned in treatment or meetings. Stay invested in their long-term recovery.

Don'ts

- Don't drink around your friend or loved one, even in social situations.
- Don't take on all their responsibilities.
- Don't provide financial support unless the money is going directly to treatment.
- Don't tell them what to do or what's best for them.

Treating alcoholism isn't easy, and it doesn't always work the first time around. Often a person has been contemplating abstinence for some time, yet couldn't get sober on their own. Patience is necessary. Don't blame yourself if the first intervention isn't successful. The most successful treatment happens when a person wants to change.

Get help for yourself

Remember to take care of yourself, too. The emotional impact of helping a loved one stay sober can take a toll. Seek help from a therapist or a counselor if you feel stressed or depressed. You can also participate in a program that's designed for the friends and family members of alcoholics, such as [Al-Anon](#).

Don't become codependent

When alcoholism affects a spouse or partner, it's possible to become too wrapped up in their well-being. This is called [codependency](#). You may get to the point where you feel compelled to help your person get well. However, family members and friends often have deep emotional ties that prevent them from having the objective viewpoint necessary for treatment.

If you don't control codependency, it can lead into more serious complications such as obsessive behavior, blame, and mental health issues.

Fortunately, you can still be supportive without becoming a counselor or coach.

Supportive tips

- Be empathetic when approaching your loved one.
- Be honest about your concerns and offer your support.
- Let the person know you're there if they need someone to talk to.
- Offer to take them to meetings.
- Take good care of yourself.

Finding the right way to approach someone you think may have an alcohol use disorder can be tough. Before you speak with them, try putting yourself in their shoes. The most important thing is to let them know that you care and that you'll be there when they need your support.