



How Family and Friends Can Support Recovery From Opioid Use Disorder



Partnering for Better Chronic Pain Management and Safer Opioid Use: A Knowledge Hub for People With Disability and Their Providers

Introduction | Treatment and recovery from opioid use disorder are physically and emotionally difficult. Along the way, you can support and encourage people with addiction to keep working at recovery.

- Acknowledge the challenges your family member or friend is going through.
- Accept that recovery takes time and there may be moments when your loved one may return to opioid use.

Living with someone else’s substance use can be hard for family members too. You don’t have to go through this alone. Family support groups offer tips and support from others who are going through similar challenges as they support someone through treatment and recovery.

Myths and Facts About Addiction

Common misbeliefs can hinder a person’s recovery. Learn the facts and ways to support a person on the path to recovery.

Myths Versus Facts

Myth	Fact	Ways You Can help
<i>“People who develop problems with opioids are weak.”</i>	Addiction is not a moral failing. Genetics, biology, and environment contribute to the risk for addiction.	
<i>“It’s a hopeless case. They’ll never recover from addiction.”</i>	There is no such thing as a hopeless case. There is also no such thing as a smooth recovery. Recovery may be a long, bumpy road, but it is possible.	

Myth	Fact	Ways You Can help
<i>“Opioid addiction can be cured after a 30-day treatment program.”</i>	While treatment is the first step to recovery, opioid use disorder is a chronic health condition.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Help the person continue to access needed treatment and recovery resources. ■ Encourage the person to attend peer recovery group sessions regularly, receive ongoing counseling, and avoid unhealthy relationships and situations.
<i>“I should let this person hit rock bottom. Otherwise, they won’t change.”</i>	The potential for opioid overdose and risk of death is so high that letting someone hit rock bottom is too dangerous.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Remain open and kind to the person with addiction. ■ If someone in your life is recovering from opioid use disorder, make sure to have naloxone (nuh-lok-sohn) on hand and learn how to use it. Overdose most often happens when someone stops taking medication for addiction treatment. It can occur when someone is taking medication to treat opioid use disorder.
<i>“It is pointless to continue having the same conversations over and over. Nothing I say will help this person get treatment.”</i>	It may take multiple , ongoing conversations for a person to be ready for change.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Continue to be open to listening and talking about treatment and recovery. ■ You never know which conversation will make a difference in someone’s life.
<i>“If I don’t cut this person off, I will enable them.”</i>	Ongoing, positive social support helps minimize the risk of recurrent use of opioids. It also helps the person to overcome challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Make yourself available for social support. For your well-being, it is important to set boundaries about what behavior is and is not acceptable for you. ■ Join support groups for friends and families to learn how to care for yourself while supporting your loved one.

How Families and Friends Can Help

Each person’s pathway to recovery is different. It is important to ask the person in recovery what they need.

- A person’s need for support can change over time.
- Be ready to adapt and follow the lead of the person in recovery. It is their journey.
- Don’t take responsibility for the process, and don’t take ownership of it.

Along with providing emotional support, there are other ways to help a person in recovery once they leave treatment.

- Assist with transportation to appointments and doctor's visits.
- Encourage the person to attend recovery aftercare programs.
- Attend recovery meetings open to family and friends for support and to learn about managing addiction.
- Learn to identify signs of opioid use disorder and return to use. To learn more, see the *Knowledge Hub* resource [Understanding Signs and Symptoms of Opioid Use Disorder](#).
- Encourage the person to learn new and different ways to manage pain. See the *Knowledge Hub* resource [Methods for Managing Chronic Pain Other Than Medication](#) for some ideas.
- If you see signs that worry you, talk to the person's addiction treatment provider.

There are many resources online to learn more about addiction. The resources listed below are good places to start.

- The Brain in Recovery (Recovery Research Institute): <https://www.recoveryanswers.org/recovery-101/brain-in-recovery/>
- What Is Substance Abuse Treatment? A Booklet for Families (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, or SAMHSA): <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/What-Is-Substance-Abuse-Treatment-A-Booklet-for-Families/SMA14-4126>

Suicide Awareness

People with chronic pain are at greater risk for suicide. If you are worried your loved one may be thinking about suicide, don't wait. GET HELP! Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline for free and confidential help and resources.

- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** The U.S. government provides funding for this resource. The Lifeline offers free and confidential help to people who are considering suicide and to their families. Help is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
 - CALL 1-800-273-8255.
 - For TTY users: Use your preferred relay service or dial 711, then 1-800-273-8255.
 - Learn more: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>



Resources for Family and Friends

It is important to support a family member or friend going through recovery. It is equally important to take care of yourself. Recovery from addiction is a lifelong battle. Helping a loved one can take a toll on you. You are allowed to put yourself first. Seek out resources to support yourself as a caregiver.

Family support groups are often free. They are a good place to share your feelings and learn from others who have experienced similar challenges. Below are links to support group resources.

- **Faces & Voices of Recovery:** A complete guide to online and in-person resources for family and friends. <https://facesandvoicesofrecovery.org/resources/mutual-aid-resources/?fct=mutual-aid-resource-category&fvc=family-and-friend-focused>
- **Learn to Cope:** A support network that offers education, resources, and peer support for parents and family members coping with a loved one addicted to opiates or other drugs. <https://www.learn2cope.org/>
- **National Alliance on Mental Illness:** NAMI offers peer-led groups for adults with a loved one who has symptoms of a mental health condition: <https://nami.org/Support-Education/Support-Groups/NAMI-Family-Support-Group>



For more information visit: Partnering for Better Chronic Pain Management and Safer Opioid Use: A Knowledge Hub for People With Disability and Their Providers | [KnowledgeHub.air.org](https://www.knowledgehub.air.org)

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