

Drug use in the family.

A support guide for family and friends

Having a family member who uses drugs can cause stress, conflict, worry and despair. It is normal to feel helpless, frustrated, worried and upset by someone's drug use.

People who use drugs can behave very erratically, and it can be difficult to know how to act around them. Their drug use may contribute to them acting in distressing ways. They may become aggressive, angry and violent, or withdrawn and detached. All members of the family can be affected, and while there are no simple answers, the following may help.

Assess the risk

Gather knowledge about drugs and their effects so you can better understand the situation your family may be in. By understanding the effects, you can weigh up the risk to both the person using drugs and those around them.

Find the effects of over forty different drugs at adf.org.au/drug-facts

What you can do

It helps to just listen. If the person wants to talk to you about their drug use, listen without interrupting, judging or becoming upset. When they have finished talking, repeat what they've said back to them in a calm voice – this helps to check in and see that you have understood what they are telling you.

How can I tell if someone is using drugs?

It is difficult to tell that someone is using drugs. The effects of drugs vary greatly. Changes in behaviour or moods may indicate drug use; however, these changes may be a sign of an issue in the person's life that is not drug-related.

Signs that appear to be uncharacteristic of the person may require your attention, regardless of whether drugs are involved. These signs include:

- Mood swings
- Tiredness
- Explosive outbursts
- Minimal interaction with family
- Trouble with the police
- Changes in eating patterns
- Frequent absences from school/work
- Sudden changes of friends
- Unexplained need for money
- Declining school/work performance
- Impaired memory
- Decrease in activities that were important to the person previously
- Poor concentration
- Withdrawing socially
- Disappearing money and valuables.

Doing this creates a ‘safe space’ for them to be honest about their problem. If they want help, they know that they can come to you and not be judged.

Sometimes a person isn’t ready to seek help, but you can still support them. Encourage them to change. You can help them think about change by being there and supportive.

Choose a time to talk when you are both relaxed, and the person is not using drugs. Ask calm, respectful questions, for example:

- What do you like about using drugs?
- What don’t you like?

If they don’t want to talk, don’t force the conversation.

Family members are often well placed to help people make safer choices about drugs and to contact support services for further help.

Set limits

Be clear to the person what is and isn’t ok behaviour and also what will happen if they break the rules.

It is important to stay safe and get support for yourself and your family.

Help them be responsible

It is difficult to see someone you love getting into debt or breaking the law but think about how giving them money may help them to continue to use drugs.

If you do give them money, make sure you give them no more than you can afford to not get back.

Real long-term change is a decision that means making a lot of changes for the person who is using drugs. They may need your help or the help of others.

Look into treatment options

If the person is talking about giving up drugs, make sure you have information on treatment options.

Treatment options

Talk to your GP, a local drug and alcohol worker or health service. A range of treatment options are available to assist someone who might be dependent on drugs.

They include:

- Withdrawal management/detoxification (detox)
- Counselling
- Residential Rehabilitation (rehab)
- Drugs in pregnancy services
- Complementary therapies such as massage
- Support groups.

You aren’t alone, and help is available

We know this isn’t easy for you – you’re probably feeling anxious, helpless and desperate for a solution. And to make things harder, not much can change until the person using drugs is ready to admit there’s a problem and is willing to make a decision to change their use.

But there are things you can do to stay on top of how you feel. You could think about:

- Talking with a trusted friend or family member
- Talking to your local doctor
- Joining a support group
- Doing activities that you enjoy.

Making sure you ‘have a life’, continue to do the things that make you happy and stay connected to your family and friends.

You do not have to deal with drug issues alone. For information and advice call DrugInfo on 1300 85 85 84

For tips and support on dealing with a friend or family member who is using drugs contact Family Drug Help on 1300 660 068




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 1300 85 85 84

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