

# How Can I Help My Struggling Friend?

## Three Guidelines for Helping Someone You Care About with a Substance Abuse Problem

True friendships are built on a caring and honesty. If you find yourself in a situation where someone you care about has been abusing drugs or alcohol, chances are they are heading down a path of self-destruction.

How do you handle this? While every friendship has unique qualities, below are three suggested guidelines that may be helpful in dealing with a friend who is struggling with addiction:

### BE A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE FRIEND

Healthy friendships are characterized by a certain degree of safety, vulnerability, and the knowledge that each of you 'has the other's back.' Keep in mind that as your friend's addiction becomes worse, he or she may begin to isolate and pull away from healthy relationships.

Communicate to your friend that you are trustworthy, that he or she can talk with you without fear of judgement or exposure. **The only exception is if your friend communicates an intent or consideration to physically injure himself/herself or another person. You should share this information with an adult you trust.**

Drug and alcohol abuse are usually symptoms of something much deeper going on. It's important to give friends room and space to share honestly and openly, without pressuring them or judging them. Remember, we cannot and do not need to 'fix' other people. However, reminding a friend who is struggling that he/she is not alone, and keeping the lines of communication can make all the difference.

### SET APPROPRIATE BOUNDARIES

You may need to consider setting boundaries with your friend. There is a difference between being a supportive friend and enabling an addiction and destructive behavior. If your friend's addiction continues, his or her behavior and the way they treat others will become more harmful, hurtful and unhealthy.

Set an example of healthy behavior without attacking your friend as a person. Focus on the behavior, not him or her as a person. For example, perhaps your friend often misses class or doesn't keep obligations, because he or she partied late the night before. Continue to set an example of appropriate behavior, and don't be afraid to be honest about how the behavior hurts or affects you and the friendship.

### BE A BRIDGE

The key to someone getting help for their addiction or alcoholism is willingness. When your friend realizes and accepts he or she has a problem that is adversely affecting their life and relationships, you are in an influential position to encourage them to take the next step of getting help.

We recognize that you or your friend may not know where to get the most appropriate help. Although an internet search can provide information and resources, it can also be daunting and overwhelming.

We suggest you make direct contact with someone who is working a recovery program in your community to ask for help. People active in 12-Step Recovery Programs—such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA)—are great resources, who stand ready and willing to help and assist anyone in need, including your friend.