

# Concerned about a family member's substance use?

Get the facts, develop strategies and  
find out where to access more help.



**Breakthrough**

For Families **Queensland**

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Drug Information and Support



# What are psychoactive substances?

Psychoactive substances are any medicines or drugs that affect the way someone...



Legal examples of psychoactive substances include alcohol, caffeine and tobacco. Illegal examples are things like cannabis, heroin and methamphetamine.

It's important to remember that just because a substance is legal doesn't automatically mean that it is safe. Alcohol, tobacco and prescription painkillers cause much more harm across the community than illicit drugs.

## Substances are commonly classified as:



### Depressants

Slow down the central nervous system (e.g. alcohol, codeine, heroin, benzodiazepines).



### Stimulants

Speed up the central nervous system (e.g. nicotine, caffeine, methamphetamine, cocaine).



### Hallucinogens

Distort senses, mood and thought (e.g. LSD, magic mushrooms).

Some substances can have a combination of effects, for example cannabis and some inhalants can have a depressant, stimulant and/or hallucinogenic effect all at the same time.

# Why do people use substances?

There are lots of different reasons. Some people use them to treat pain or relieve symptoms of anxiety or depression. Other people use them to enhance their enjoyment of activities or to assist in other areas of their life.

**Whatever the reason, it is important to understand the purpose or function of the substance use in someone's life before it can be addressed.**



## Dependence

Everybody reacts to drugs differently. The same substance, at the same dose, may cause different effects for different people, especially when used in different environments.

However if someone is

- spending a great deal of time getting, using, or recovering from the effects of a substance;
- drinking or using in greater amounts, or for longer than originally planned;
- continuing to drink or use despite experiencing problems; or
- needing to drink or use more of the substance to feel the same effects...

then it is likely that they might be 'dependent' on that substance.

## What can families do?

It can be difficult to know how to respond, especially when the substance use causes changes to the way your family member behaves. It is important to remember that families have different ways of coping.

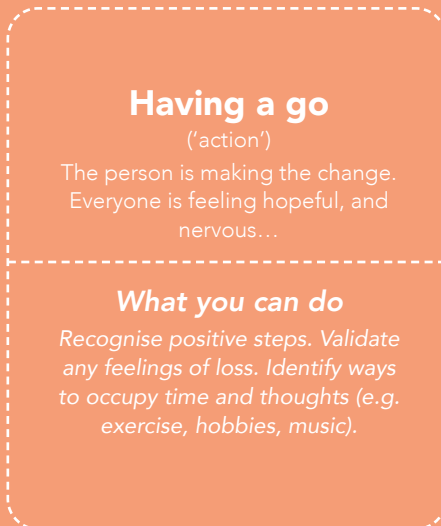
**It is normal to feel angry, upset, scared or helpless.  
There is no 'right' way to respond.**

# The Stages of Change

The Stages of Change is a model that describes the phases that people move through when they make a significant change in their life. It can be useful to understand what stage your family member is in, as it gives you clues on how you can best support them.



This diagram is based on the transtheoretical model developed by James O. Prochaska and Carlo Di Clemente, 1982, 1986



# What is alcohol and drug treatment?



## Counselling

During counselling, people are encouraged to talk about their substance use and other issues such as their health, relationships, behaviours and lifestyle.



## Detoxification / Withdrawal Services

This is where a person is supervised while their body comes off a drug. It can be “in-patient” (i.e. in a hospital) or “out-patient”, depending on how risky it is.



## Rehabilitation Services

Rehabs provide a stable, longer term environment for people after they have detoxed. It can be either residential or non-residential (e.g. ‘day programs’).



## Peer Support Groups

These are voluntary self-help groups to address substance use or maintain abstinence (e.g. AA, NA & Smart Recovery). Can include support from Elders for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

There are also special programs that provide replacement medications for people who are dependent upon opioids such as heroin or prescription painkillers.

**NB: Availability of these services varies across Queensland.**

# A few things to keep in mind



Different things work for different people. Not everybody needs rehab.



Detox by itself can be difficult to sustain. It tends to be more successful if counselling is offered before, during and afterwards.



Some people will only need a little bit of help to deal effectively with their substance use; others may require treatment for many months or even years.



There are no mandated or involuntary treatment options available in Queensland.



There are a number of free, public alcohol and drug treatment services, which need to meet certain standards to receive government funding. There are also a range of private, commercial operators. Do your research before choosing the best option for you.



Your GP is a good first point of call for advice about treatment. You can also phone Adis 24/7 Alcohol and Drug Support on 1800 177 833 (see the back page for more details).

# Tips for effective communication



Preferably choose a time to talk when your family member is not intoxicated or 'coming down'.



Talk to them with respect, like an adult. Be conscious of your body language and tone.



Try to remain non-judgmental.



Talk to them about how they are feeling, rather than focusing on what they are doing.



Ask questions. Listen. Try to find out what they like, and don't like about their substance use.



Separate what is about the substance use, and what isn't. Separate the person from their behaviour.



Let the person know how their drug use is impacting you. Use "I" statements, rather than "you" statements.



Encourage them to talk about their substance use with a GP or counsellor.



# Boundaries are important

Set clear, workable boundaries around what is and what is not OK in your home, space and relationship which are realistic for you and your family.

Don't threaten or blame. Set realistic consequences that you can live with and communicate them clearly.

Make sure that you are willing to follow through with the consequences. If you are not actually going to kick them out of home – don't threaten it!

Remember, all family members must maintain the boundaries for them to work.

Review your boundaries regularly.

# Supporting change

It is important to acknowledge and celebrate positive changes, no matter how small. For example:

Using Less



Using in a Safer Way



Improvements in Health or Lifestyle



**Remember,** having a slip-up can be a part of the recovery process. It's also an opportunity to learn. Encourage your family member to keep going and not give up.

# Other things you can encourage your family member to do:

**Good Sleep Habits**



**Healthy Diet**



**Exercise**



**Sport**



**Hobbies**



**Interests**



**Social Activity**



**Mindfulness/  
Meditation**



## Avoid Triggers

Avoiding triggers means staying away from things that might be associated with drinking or using drugs.

Remember, people who are cutting back or quitting can sometimes experience low mood, anxiety, poor sleep or be irritable. Try to be extra gentle and understanding while their body and mind adjusts to the change.

# What if they're not ready to change?

**If you're able to, still offer them support.**

See if you can enlist the help of other family members and friends to create a support network around them.

Keep including them in family activities if possible. Do things to keep them engaged and to remind them that they are part of the family.

**You can also encourage them to:**

Set limits on how much or for how long they will use or how much they will spend.

Not drink or use alone, and to avoid drink or drug driving.

Stay connected with work, study, sport, interests and friends who don't drink or use drugs.

Maintain their general health and wellbeing by eating well, staying hydrated, getting good sleep and having regular check-ups with their GP and dentist.

**“Remember, change is not always a straight forward process.”**



# Supporting children and siblings

## Remind children and siblings of the Seven "C's"

- They didn't **Cause** it.
- They can't **Cure** it.
- They can't **Control** it.
- They can **Care** for themselves by **Communicating** their feelings, making healthy **Choices**, and by **Celebrating** themselves.

Some ways to help soothe children and siblings who are stressed.

Watch movies together



Listen to music



Play together



Make and eat favourite foods



Go for a walk



# It's important to look after yourself

## Connect



**Connect** with people who can support you. This can include other family members, friends, health professionals and community groups.

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**Continue** doing things that bring you pleasure and help you feel connected, strong and healthy. This could include seeing friends, exercise, hobbies, eating good meals or taking holidays.

## Continue



## Avoid



**Avoid** dwelling on the past. Try to maintain a sense of hope. Make plans so that you are looking forward to the future.

# Where can I go for more support?

## Adis

Free 24/7 alcohol and drug support for Queenslanders  
1800 177 833  
[www.adis.health.qld.gov.au](http://www.adis.health.qld.gov.au)

## Family Drug Support

Free 24/7 telephone support, family support groups and information sessions  
Ph 1300 368 186 | [www.fds.org.au](http://www.fds.org.au)

## Cracks in the Ice

Online toolkit featuring information and resources about methamphetamine  
[www.cracksintheice.org.au](http://www.cracksintheice.org.au)

## Counselling Online

Free 24/7 online text-based alcohol and drug counselling service  
[www.counsellingonline.org.au](http://www.counsellingonline.org.au)

For more information visit  
[www.breakthroughqueensland.com.au](http://www.breakthroughqueensland.com.au)

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