

TAKE ACTION!

Alcohol, Other Drug Problems

Your Family . . .

*Every family
can take action
to prevent and
deal with alcohol
and other drug
problems.*

*Turn the page
and start today!*



camh

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
Centre de toxicomanie et de santé mentale

To find out more about alcohol and other drugs, visit CAMH's website at www.camh.net or call CAMH's R. Samuel McLaughlin Information Centre at 1 800 463-6273.

In Toronto, call 416 595-6111.

The service includes a toll-free information line, a telephone support line and resources on mental health and substance use problems for Ontarians.

The service is available in English and French. Taped messages include: Alcohol, Children and the Family; Talking with your Kids About Drugs; Does My Teenager Have a Drug Problem?; and An Early Start: Drug Education Begins at Home.

Information on some topics is also available in Arabic, Cantonese, Farsi, Greek, Hindi, Italian, Mandarin, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Spanish and Urdu.

What Does A Typical “Family” Look Like?



There is no one picture. Families are different. They come in every shape and size and they are changing all the time. Whatever “family” means to you, your family is important to your health and happiness.

While every family has its problems, most families can be a source of great happiness, love, and support when difficulties arise.

This booklet was designed to help you and your family take action to prevent and deal with problems related to the use of alcohol and other drugs.

TAKE ACTION!

Preventing

Alcohol and Other Drug Problems in Your Family

Take action now!

*Read on for tips on how to
prevent alcohol and other drug
problems in your family.*

Talk About It

When a family knows how to talk — and listen — to each other, serious problems, like those related to alcohol or other drugs, are less likely to develop. Being able to talk openly and honestly with one another strengthens families and brings family members closer together.

Things You Can Do:

- 1.** Make sure your family talks about alcohol and other drugs before there is a problem. Make sure you know the facts! If you don't know the answer to a question someone asks, say so and look for the answer together.
- 2.** Prepare yourself for a variety of attitudes, values and beliefs that will come up when you discuss alcohol and other drugs. Try to sort out your own feelings and understand those of other family members.
- 3.** Talk about both sides — the pros and the cons — of using alcohol and other drugs. People use alcohol and other drugs for a wide variety of reasons.
- 4.** Make sure family members, from the youngest to the oldest, have a chance to express opinions without being interrupted.
- 5.** If somebody's point of view is unclear, ask for it to be explained in another way, until you understand it. Repeat it to make sure.
- 6.** Try to “hear” and respond to the feelings behind the words that people use.

Be sensitive to age differences when talking about alcohol and other drugs. Young children, for example, usually accept answers from parents; teens may not. Don't expect teens to agree with everything that their parents say.

Look for interesting ways to bring up the topic of alcohol and other drugs. When you see tobacco, alcohol or other drugs used on a TV show, advertised on a billboard, in a magazine or in a movie, you might want to ask questions like, "Why were drugs shown that way?" or "How did alcohol make that person feel?"

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Information on some of these topics is available in Arabic, Cantonese, Farsi, Greek, Hindi, Italian, Mandarin, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Spanish and Urdu.

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Support Each Other

Having someone you can count on in your family can make a big difference. Show your love, listen, follow through with promises, and be ready to help when asked — all are ways to develop support in the family. Knowing you can count on your family can mean fewer problems with alcohol and other drugs.

Things You Can Do:

1. Build confidence and self-esteem. Be generous — and genuine — with praise for what family members do well and when they try to do better. Things can't always be perfect. Have realistic expectations and recognize even small achievements.
2. Express your worries about family members in a way that shows you care about the other person's well-being and safety.
3. Try to keep things in perspective. When there is a problem, don't be overwhelmed by it. Remember, there's something positive in most situations.
4. Accept and value each member of your family as a unique person. Everyone's different. Encourage differences and avoid making comparisons among family members.
5. Recognize that everyone has an opinion. Young children, teens, parents, grandparents, and family members not living at home can all have something important to contribute.

Don't put conditions on your love, by saying, "I'll love you if..." The people in your family need to know that, no matter what they do or say, you'll still love them.

Try different ways to show your love and that you care. Give warm hugs and smiles, listen, and take an interest in the activities of others.

Look for chances to share activities with individual members of your family, like going to a ball game, going for a swim, baking cookies, walking the dog, going for a bike ride or playing games.

When you're under stress, it's OK to ask for help. Give your immediate family, other relatives or friends a chance to offer support. There's often someone to give the support you need.

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Set the Rules

A family works best when it sets rules and responsibilities for each member. Tension, arguments and stress — things that can contribute to problems with alcohol or other drugs — can be avoided when there are guidelines to follow.

Things You Can Do:

1. Have a set of rules for all important issues, including the use of alcohol and other drugs. You can talk about them or even write them down. The important thing is that your family has rules and everyone understands what they are.
2. Get your whole family — from the youngest to the oldest — involved in making the rules. The best rules are the ones everyone helped make.
3. Think about the expectations your family has regarding the use of alcohol, tobacco, prescribed and over-the-counter medications, and other drugs. Does everyone know them? Are they clear? Has everyone agreed to them? If not, discuss and agree on the family's expectations and rules. You may want to talk about:
 - drinking and driving
 - smoking
 - alcohol use at parties
 - taking prescription drugs that are not yours
 - mixing alcohol with other drugs

- getting drunk
- serving alcohol in your home
- using illegal drugs.

Talk about what will happen if rules are broken. Consider a range of consequences for each rule that is broken. Make sure the rules and consequences are consistently enforced and respected by all family members.

Encourage family members to ask questions to make sure they really understand the expectations and rules, and the consequences of breaking them.

Encourage family members to assume responsibility for their actions. Everyone should be allowed to make their own choices — and be responsible for the consequences. You can be sensitive and concerned about other family members, but don't take on responsibility for their behavior, such as their misuse of alcohol or other drugs.

Praise good behavior, especially when family members follow the rules about substance use.

Review the rules from time to time as a family, and update them if you need to. As people grow older, some rules may need to change (e.g., when teens reach the legal drinking age).

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Be a Good Role Model

The things you say and do can have a strong influence on other members of your family. Children notice — and imitate — the way their parents, older brothers or sisters, and other relatives handle alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. That's why it's important to be a good role model. If you do use alcohol or prescription drugs, use them wisely.

Things You Can Do:

1. Think about the kind of example you set for your family. If you answer “yes” to any of the following questions, you may want to make a change!
 - Has your family ever seen you drunk?
 - Do you always drink when you celebrate something important?
 - Do you think it's cool or funny to get drunk?
 - Do you smoke cigarettes?
 - Do you smoke marijuana?
 - Do you drink alcohol every day?
 - Do you take sleeping pills often?
 - Do you ever drink and drive?
2. Drink in moderation: you're less likely to have problems with alcohol if you drink no more than one or two drinks a day. It's a good idea to avoid drinking at all, at least one day a week. Know when it's important not to drink.
3. When you drink or use drugs, don't drive — there's no guaranteed safe level.
4. Don't use alcohol with medications. The combination can be dangerous.

Avoid using alcohol or other drugs to cope with stress. It may become a habit that you can't control. Look for other ways to deal with stress that won't harm you or your family, such as talking with a friend, exercising, going for a walk or taking a warm bath.

Make sure you offer alcohol-free drinks when you host a party or have people over. If a person chooses not to drink, don't single them out.

Be sure to talk to your family about the risk of smoking — even if you smoke. Let them know how hard it is to quit. Don't ask children to buy cigarettes for you. If someone's smoking bothers you, it's OK to let them know.

Let your family know — by what you say and what you do — that using drugs is not glamorous or funny, no matter how it is shown in movies or on TV. The way you talk about and react to the misuse of alcohol and other drugs is important. It helps shape the attitudes, opinions and behavior of other family members.

Show your family, by example, that you don't have to use alcohol or other drugs to have a good time.

If you begin to notice problems because you're using alcohol or other drugs, it's time to cut back or stop. If you need help, get it. You may want to talk to a family member, a friend, a professional counsellor, your doctor or a trusted member of your spiritual or faith community.

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Express Yourself

Everybody has feelings about other family members and what happens in their family. Feelings are not good or bad in themselves. It's what you do with feelings that matters. Sometimes it's hard, but speaking up and letting others know how you feel can help avoid misunderstandings and help bring family members closer together.

Things you can do:

1. Avoid trying to guess what other family members feel; ask them instead. You can only know and speak accurately about your own feelings.
2. Make time for family members to share their feelings about important things. Try to “be there” for them when they want to talk. If they choose a time that's not good for you, ask if it can wait until you have more time, and then follow-up as soon as you can.
3. Let people know when you're pleased with the way things are going, not just when you're upset.
4. Remember, it's natural and normal to sometimes feel angry, frustrated and hurt by others — even people you're close to.
5. Let other family members know how much you care for them. Create opportunities to tell — and show — your family how much you love them.

Be as clear as possible when you talk about how a family member's use of alcohol or other drugs makes you feel. For example:

- "When you smoke cigarettes, I worry about your health."
- "When you go to a party and drink, I'm scared you will drive home."

Discuss the things you're angry or upset about with the person whose behavior led to the feelings; try not to take "it" out on others.

Don't keep your feelings bottled up. Find the right moment to express them. Others need to know how you feel and have a chance to respond.

If you have trouble talking to a family member, don't give up. Ask someone you're comfortable with for help with ideas on how to do it. Together, think of different ways you can approach the other family member. Then try one!

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Make Time for One Another

In any family, it's important to spend time together. When you share interests and activities, your family ties grow stronger. Families that make time for one another are less likely to have problems with alcohol and other drugs. But sharing activities together doesn't just happen; you have to work at it.

Things You Can Do:

- 1.** Have family traditions, such as celebrating birthdays, holidays and anniversaries. Also, find other reasons for the family to celebrate, like a good score on a test, a new job, a new pet, talking about a problem, another school year, a new season or a great idea!
- 2.** Involve everyone when you plan things to do. Sometimes you may have to compromise to make sure everyone's happy and feels included.
- 3.** Join in the fun, even when you're not doing one of your favorite activities. Participating in other family members' activities shows interest and respect.
- 4.** Set aside time to get together regularly. If you're really busy, try planning to eat at least one meal a week together (with the TV off and no one reading the paper!).
- 5.** Use these times together to talk about lots of things — things that concern you. Make sure all family members are given a chance to speak and be heard.

Plan activities that strengthen the bond between family members, like camping, going to a ball game, concert, bowling or fishing, even if they don't involve the whole family.

Be spontaneous, go with the flow and be flexible! Often, the best times are those that haven't been planned. Decide on a whim to visit a community fair or the circus, or just enjoy an unexpected beautiful day together.

Involve everyone in dealing with difficult times, as well as the good times. Even a crisis can bring your family closer together.

Listen carefully for times when family members ask for or want to help — like when someone asks for help with homework, wants a story read, wants to go shopping or run errands. He or she may just want to spend some time with you!

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TAKE ACTION!

Dealing With

Alcohol and

Other Drug

Problems in

Your Family

Take action now!

*Read on for tips on how to
deal with alcohol or other
drug problems in your family.*

Raise the Issue

When someone is having problems with alcohol or other drugs, they usually don't want to talk about it. Although it's hard to bring the topic up, it's important that you try. You may need to talk about it more than once. You may have to get other family members to support you when you talk to the person you're concerned about. And if you don't feel safe or comfortable about talking to the person, get help from a professional in your community.

Things You Can Do:

- 1.** If you think there is a problem in your family related to alcohol or other drugs, pick a good time to raise the issue. Try to include everyone in the family who is touched by the problem. Find time when people are calm and there are no distractions. Raising the issue when you are angry or when the person is drinking or using drugs is not a good time.
- 2.** Let the person know you care and that's why you're raising the issue.
- 3.** Have some specific events that you can refer to. Talk about the behavior that is the problem in a factual, honest way, rather than making general statements about the person. For example, "I was really concerned when you came home drunk last night," is better than, "You're nothing but a drunk."
- 4.** If you're unsure whether alcohol or drug use is causing the problem, check it out in a concerned way. Accusations can lead the person to deny the problem, even if one exists. Ask questions that encourage people to talk rather than give "yes" or "no" answers.

Focus your comments on the effects the use of alcohol or other drugs has on you, others in the family and the person who's using.

Offer support. Let the person know you're prepared to help change things that may be adding to the person's use of alcohol or other drugs.

Discuss the problem with someone you trust to get support, like a family member, friend, a professional counsellor, your doctor or a member of the clergy.

Learn as much as you can about alcohol and other drug use and the help that's available in your community. Visit the CAMH website at www.camh.net. You can call CAMH's R. Samuel McLaughlin Information Centre at 1 800 463-6273. In Toronto, call 416 595-6111. You can also call the Drug and Alcohol Registry of Treatment (DART) at 1 800 565-8603 (www.dart.on.ca) to find out about withdrawal management services in your community and throughout Ontario.

Don't give up if the person doesn't want to talk about the issue, even though you may feel discouraged. Try again — maybe using a different approach.

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Solve Problems Together

Problems happen in all families. What's important is how your family works together to solve them. You need to use the combined strengths and skills of all family members — especially when dealing with serious issues such as alcohol and other drug problems.

Things You Can Do:

1. Face the problem as soon as possible. Serious problems such as alcohol or drug abuse do not go away on their own. They have to be dealt with.
2. Include everyone who needs to be involved in solving the problem. You may need to think carefully about how to do so. Make sure each person knows all the important facts.
3. Keep things in perspective! Don't downplay the problem, but don't make it bigger than it is either.
4. Don't talk down to people and remember, it's important to listen. Try to create an atmosphere in which family members feel they're partners in solving the problem. Let all family members talk about how they see the problem and how it affects them. It will most likely be different for everyone.
5. Agree on realistic goals and the steps each family member needs to take to get there. Don't expect everyone — especially young children — to be able to take on the same level of responsibility.

Be patient! Things may not work out right away. The important thing is that you are trying to work together and that efforts are recognized and appreciated.

Look at how your family worked out other problems in the past. Learn from these experiences.

Keep your family's values, rules and goals about alcohol and other drug use in mind as you deal with challenging situations.

Have confidence in your family's ability to work out the problem. But, if you can't solve the problem together, don't look on it as a failure. When you need outside help, don't be afraid to ask for it! There's no shame in seeking help from others when dealing with alcohol or other drug problems in the family.

Celebrate your success when you work out a difficult problem. Do something that the family enjoys, such as making a special dinner or going on an outing together.

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Learn How to Cope

It isn't easy being part of a family when there's a problem with alcohol or other drugs. You probably go through times when you feel stressed, lonely and really frustrated. There may even be days when you just want to run away from it all. Try some of these tips on how to cope.

Things You Can Do:

1. Remember, it's OK to be angry and still love and care for the family member with the problem. Even though your feelings may seem very strong and upsetting, it's normal to feel that way.
2. Don't blame yourself for the family member's problems with alcohol or other drugs. They are not your fault; you didn't cause them; you can't control or cure them.
3. Remind yourself you're not alone — other people like you are struggling with problems just like yours.
4. Try not to protect the person with the problem. Making excuses, like calling in sick to an employer, is not helpful in the long run.
5. Find a balance between helping and taking over. Sometimes teens, for example, out of genuine concern, will start doing things for their mother or father with a problem. They may put a parent who has passed out to bed, take care of younger brothers or sisters, clean, shop or pay bills. In the long run, "helping" in this way, by taking over, may not be in the family's best interest.

Try not to think about your family problems all of the time. Get involved in outside activities that will help you get on with your own life. Take up a hobby, join a club, play sports or volunteer. Be good to yourself.

Remember, your own health, safety and well-being are important. Even if you're not the one with the alcohol or other drug problem, you may need support. Know when you need to talk to another family member, a friend, a professional counsellor, your doctor or a member of the clergy. Ask for help if you need it.

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Handle Conflict Wisely

Conflicts and disagreements are part of every family. Differences of opinion aren't only natural — they may even be healthy. What matters is the way your family deals with disagreements about important issues, such as alcohol and other drug use, and whether these disagreements bring you closer together or drive you apart.

Things You Can Do:

- 1.** Timing is important! Sometimes conflict can be dealt with right away. But often it's better to wait until the crisis has passed and family members have calmed down.
- 2.** Include every family member who's involved in the conflict or affected by it. Remember, young children, and family members who live away from home, can have insights or add something important.
- 3.** Before you talk about the problem, set simple "rules" for the discussion, like:
 - stay on topic
 - no name-calling
 - no nagging, lecturing or screaming
 - don't bring up things from the past
 - no interrupting when someone else is speaking.
- 4.** Be fair. Don't generalize about the person you're angry with, by saying, "You always..." or "You never..."

Avoid labelling or blaming people. Using terms such as “alcoholic” or “drug addict” doesn’t help bring the family together to work things out. Instead, such words can make people feel worse.

Give all family members a chance to say how they feel about the issue. Let everyone suggest possible solutions.

Be patient! Have realistic hopes about solutions and everyone’s ability to change.

Know when to let go. Most problems aren’t solved quickly. When you make progress — even if the problem is not yet fully worked out — praise the family members who helped make things better.

Learn from your experiences in handling conflict. Think about how you could deal with things better next time.

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Know How to Get Help

Alcohol and other drug problems create difficulties for the whole family — not just the person with the problem. That's why everyone should feel free to get help and support. At the same time, the family can encourage the person with the problem to get the help that's needed.

Things You Can Do:

- 1.** Discuss your concern with another person — someone you trust and respect, such as a family member, friend, teacher, counsellor, doctor or trusted member of your spiritual or faith community.
- 2.** Learn about drugs and their effects. Call CAMH's R. Samuel McLaughlin Information Centre at 1 800 463-6273. In Toronto, call 416 595-6111. Visit the CAMH website at www.camh.net.
- 3.** Find out about the kinds of treatment and help available. If you're not sure about the services in your community, you can call the Drug and Alcohol Registry of Treatment (DART) at 1 800 565-8603 (www.dart.on.ca).
- 4.** If you decide to talk to the family member who has the problem, think about who else to involve, and when and where to hold the discussion.
- 5.** Encourage and assist the person with the problem in getting help. But remember, you can't force anybody to get treatment — the final decision is with the person who has the problem.

Be persistent but patient. These kinds of changes don't happen right away. It takes time for a person to admit problems and do something about them. Avoid criticizing the person for not moving more quickly.

Remember that related issues may have to be dealt with in addition to the alcohol or drug problem, such as marital, emotional, financial, legal and health problems.

Don't accept rude or physically abusive behavior. It's never OK to be mistreated by anyone, even when the family member is drunk or stoned. If this happens, don't make excuses. It's time to TAKE ACTION!

Don't forget your own needs. You can help others better when you're healthy and happy yourself.

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Also available from CAMH



Wishes and Worries: A Story to Help Children Understand a Parent Who Drinks Too Much Alcohol (product code P5599)

Written for children from five to 10 years old, this interactive resource is for parents, extended family, teachers and addiction and mental health professionals who want to address the impact of an alcohol problem on children's lives.

CAMH provides a variety of up-to-date resources for clients and their families. Follow this link to see what is available:
www.camh.net/publications/camh_publications/

- Want some tips on how your family can prevent alcohol and other drug problems?
- Want to talk to your family about the use of alcohol but don't know how?
- Need more information about how to cope better with problems your family may be having?

YOU CAN TAKE ACTION NOW!

This booklet will help.
It lists lots of things you
can do right away — and
it doesn't matter if you're
a mom, a dad, a kid,
a grandparent, or just
someone who cares
about a special family
you know.

For more information on addiction and mental health issues, or a copy of this booklet, please contact CAMH's R. Samuel McLaughlin Information Centre:
Ontario toll-free: 1 800 463-6273
Toronto: 416 595-6111

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Tel.: 416 535-8501 ext. 2028.

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