

ALCOHOL SUPPORT & INFORMATION

Looking after others & looking after yourself



The aim of this booklet is to offer you information about how to spot the signs of problem drinking, ways to help, changes you can make and who you can talk to for support.

Recognising a drinking problem

When someone develops a problem with drinking, often it is their partner, relative or friend who first notices that there's a problem. The person who is drinking is often not ready to deal with their use of alcohol.

Some things that families or friends of someone with a drinking problem might say:

"She tries to cover up how much she has really had to drink"

"He hides alcohol around the house"

"He can't stop drinking when the rest of us have had enough and have stopped"

"When she drinks, she never remembers what happened the night before"

"He buys extra drinks between rounds"

"She keeps promising me that she'll stop but always ends up drinking again"

"He manages to drink loads of alcohol and doesn't seem drunk"

Other warning signs of a drinking problem

When trying to spot a drinking problem, it's useful to look at **what has changed**, for example, their behaviour, habits or appearance.

Some signs are:

- Restless at night or waking up with bad dreams
- Poor personal hygiene
- Failing to join in with family activities
- Picking quarrels
- Verbally threatening you or using physical violence
- Breaking furniture or windows
- Possessive and jealous behaviour

Signs that a drinker is being controlling

The drinker may have become an expert at causing you to feel upset and angry. They may use digression, i.e. diverting the discussion away from the topic of alcohol. Some problem drinkers use threats, such as

“If you don’t leave me alone, I’ll quit my job/leave you/drink more.”

Myths about alcohol

Often people have an image of someone with a drink problem as a long-term drinker who has reached the end of the line, is out of work, has problems with relationships or is in trouble with the police. This is not always the case.

Here are some facts:

- One in four men and one in 12 women are at risk of developing an alcohol problem
- Most problem drinkers are still working and living with their families
- Many don’t drink every day of the week
- Drinking first thing in the morning is uncommon
- It doesn’t take long to develop a drink problem - young people are as much at risk as older, long-term drinkers
- People can change their drinking habits without the benefit of outside help
- Problem drinkers can change by stopping altogether but some may be successful at controlling, or reducing their drinking
- Alcohol problems can range from minor and short-term to severe and long-term

There are lots of good information leaflets about alcohol, which you can get from your local services.

Impact on the family

One of the hardest things to go through is being the friend or family member of someone with a drinking problem. You can go through a rollercoaster of emotions – denial, embarrassment, concern, and more.

Whatever the relationship of the family member to the problem drinker, most will have noticed how the alcohol use has affected:

- The way that the problem drinker interacts with other members of the family
- The family atmosphere
- The feeling of trust that you once had.

If you recognise that someone close to you may be experiencing a problem with alcohol, it can help to be able to talk to someone about this in confidence. Having someone to listen and understand what you are going through can make all the difference.

Ways that you can be helped

Sometimes we find it hard to ask for help if someone close to us has a drink problem. It may be the case that there isn't enough support being offered to us by people around us.

"I think I'm basically trying to put it out of my mind because I've got no-one to talk to about it."

It can help to talk to someone who has professional knowledge and no personal involvement in the drinking problem, for example, your GP or an alcohol counsellor. Sharing the problem may give you a sense of relief and a more positive attitude.

Many people have said that the most helpful support has been when someone has given them the space to talk openly about their problems in a way that they feel accepted and supported.

"My counsellor has helped me to see that I am a person in my own right and I could do these things."

Receiving reassurance that there is a genuine drinking problem can help you to overcome your fears about your own judgement of the situation. It can give you the confidence to confront the problem and bring it into the open.

"Receiving support has given me the strength to help my partner with her drink problem."

Talking to a counsellor will help you to identify how you are currently coping with the situation and identify new ways of coping.

"Speaking to the counsellor helped me to get things off my chest"

Once you have taken the first step in seeking help, the person with the drinking problem may also consider seeking help.

Ways of coping

There are lots of ways that people cope with someone who has a drink problem. You might find that you are doing everything that you can but still feel that you are getting nowhere.

"I cope one day at a time, I don't think of the future."

It can help to look at different approaches that people use to cope with someone with a drink problem. Can you identify with any of the following ways of coping?

Actions	Associated feelings	Example behaviours
Controlling	Worried, responsible, exhausted. <i>"There must be something I can do."</i>	Watching their every move, checking up on them. Trying to control money by keeping it from them, giving an allowance.
Emotional	Angry, hurt, bewildered <i>"It's not fair on me."</i>	Pleading with him/her about how much (s)he is drinking, accusing him/her of not loving you or letting you down.
Avoidance	Hurt, bitter <i>"We're better off apart."</i>	Hiding, keeping out of the way, leaving room when (s)he has been drinking.
Tolerant	Worried, powerless, guilty <i>"Maybe it's my fault, (s)he's in danger if I don't help him/her."</i>	Giving money even when you thought it would be spent on alcohol. Put yourself out for him/her, for example, cleaning up mess.
Inactive	Frightened, hopeless, indifferent <i>"I don't know what to do, I don't want to think about it."</i>	Feeling too frightened to do anything. Accepting the situation as part of life that can't be changed.
Assertive	Strong, calm. <i>"I've got to be firm to help him/her. It's right that (s)he should know how I feel."</i>	"Making it clear that the drinking is causing you upset and that it has to change
Supportive	Love for him/her, optimism. <i>"I've never given up hope for him/her."</i>	Trying to involve him/her in family activities or make him/her feel valued.
Independent	Self reliant. <i>"I've got my own life to lead, I can't help him/her if I go under too."</i>	Not waiting for him/her to join in family outings or activities, putting yourself first, giving yourself treats.

Helping someone recognise that they have a drink problem

Something to bear in mind is that people nearly always need to make decisions for themselves. This is true of many areas of life. A person will most likely take positive action if they feel that it is their decision, rather than an 'order' from someone else. Lecturing, demanding, bullying or begging will not help.

Usually the person with the drinking problem doesn't realise he/she has a problem, and are often in denial and may be defensive about it. It is helpful if you don't judge them about this.

"I felt so doubtful of myself, whether I've smelt alcohol or not, because he could be so convincing."

Don't let the drinker convince you that there is no problem, leading you to believe it is your problem. If drink is causing problems, it is always the responsibility of the person who is doing the drinking.

It is important to bear in mind that different things work for different people - each person's situation is unique. It is a good idea to speak to a counsellor at the same time as you are helping the person with a drinking problem.

The most helpful thing that you can do is to help the drinker come to the realisation that they need to help themselves. This is not an easy task, however the following steps may help.

Early intervention

Sometimes it is possible to spot a drink problem early on when it's still a 'psychological addiction' as opposed to a 'physical addiction'.

If a person receives help at this early stage, this can greatly increase the chances of long-term recovery and there will be no withdrawal symptoms. They may even be able to drink again in the future if they successfully deal with the underlying problems that were causing them to drink.

Plan ahead

Before talking to the person about the drinking problem, do some planning. Find three or more treatment options available in your area so that you can give the person a choice. Decide how you will approach the subject and what you will say.

Try not to accuse or blame

Try not to put blame or fault onto the drinker, as this will likely cause them to put up a wall and be defensive.

Don't 'enable' the drinking

Many people actually enable the drinker to continue drinking without realising it, for example, making excuses for the person, being overly forgiving, or going into alcohol friendly places like pubs and restaurants. All of these things make you support the person's drinking problem.

Use "I" statements and ask open ended-questions

Saying things such as *"I'm concerned about you"* or *"I'd like to help you"* or *"I feel..."* is much more open and less confrontational than *"you worry me"* or *"you need help"*. Part of enabling someone with a drink problem to recognise they need help is to have a non-confrontational conversation about their drinking.

Asking open-ended questions (questions that deliver a response instead of a 'yes' or 'no' answer) such as: *"How much do you think you are drinking?"* or *"What would make you want to stop drinking?"* is helpful.

Focus on the positives

Try to be upbeat when talking to the person about alcohol issues, for example, come up with some positive outcomes of them giving up alcohol.

Get support from friends or family

Often there is power in numbers, and if enough people close to the drinker show concern this might enable him/her to seek help. It's important to approach the drinker in the right way, showing concern and love, and not blaming, judging or criticising.

Be prepared for resistance

Many people with a drinking problem are in denial that their problem exists. Before you talk to them, think about what they might object to and how you can work those objections out. Think of ways to deal with their resistance.

Negotiate

It may be that you need to give a little in order for them to agree to get help for their drinking problem. For example, if they meet with a counsellor for one meeting, offer to do something. You can also offer to accompany them to a counselling appointment.

Show empathy

Empathy is defined as: 'the power of understanding and imaginatively entering into another person's feelings'. If you can empathise with the drinker, then this will become clear to that person over time. They will sense that you understand them. As a result of this, they will be more likely to put their trust in you and open up to you.

Have one goal

Try not to focus on the alcohol but instead have one goal: to ensure the drinker talks to someone about their drinking, for example, a counsellor.

Find activities

It can help to find pleasurable activities for the problem drinker, or for both of you. Examples could be going to the cinema or theatre, shopping, coffee shops, a drive in the countryside, a walk in the park or ten-pin bowling.

How are you feeling?

You may be experiencing feelings such as anger, hopelessness, panic, frustration, low self worth, feeling trapped in the situation or feeling responsible. These feelings are natural and understandable. One thing you should not feel is guilt about your reactions towards the drinker. If you feel that there is no way out of your situation, there is positive action that you can take.

Six ways to take care of yourself

Remember that the only person you can ever really change is yourself. If there is a positive change in you, relationships with other people will also change.

The following six steps are ways to take care of yourself when living with someone with a drink problem:

- 1. Stop taking responsibility for the drinker.** If you continue to make it easy for the person to drink, this will hold you back from reaching a more positive place in your life.
- 2. Don't allow yourself be abused by the drinker either physically or mentally.** Allowing yourself to be abused will likely cause you to feel anger and have a negative effect on your self-esteem and general wellbeing.
- 3. Get a life outside the addictive relationship.** If you feel isolated within the relationship with the drinker, it's time to break free from this. Get out and about and involved in activities that interest you. You deserve to live your life in a way that makes you happy.

- 4. Find and preserve new relationships.** Begin to develop new relationships with people and look at re-establishing friendships with old friends, relatives and close family. Organisations like Al-Anon can be an excellent way of making new friends who will share their strength and understanding.
- 5. Be healthy.** Look after your physical health and well-being by having a healthy diet, regular exercise and good hygiene.
- 6. Make daily changes.** Make sure that you are putting these positive changes into effect every day. This will take time and effort, but it will be worth it in the long term.

Your safety and the drinker's safety

If you feel at risk from physical violence, then you will have to take the appropriate action by calling the police, or leaving the premises and the immediate risk of danger. Equally, if the drinker is in immediate danger to their life, you should call the doctor or an ambulance.

Types of help available

Once the drinker recognises that they have a problem with their drinking, their options include alcohol counselling, self-help groups, for example Al-Anon, and attending an alcohol rehabilitation centre.

What help is available to you

Counselling is available through the Tayside Council on Alcohol and Fife Alcohol Support Service see the contact information on the back page of this booklet.

"The support from the TCA has really helped."

"It has been so helpful to talk to someone who really understands what I'm going through."

Kinship care

Kinship care is a non-legal term used to describe an arrangement where a child or young person lives with and is cared for by grandparents, aunts, uncles, sisters, brothers or family friends on a full time basis.

Kinship carers step in to care for children during times of family crisis, when the parent(s) become unable to provide the appropriate level of care and supervision needed by the children. Sometimes this can be planned and takes place with

agreement and support from within the wider family network. Often this happens as the result of a crisis or particular incident and may be unplanned, frequently accompanied by heightened emotions and distress.

Caring for children, whether that is on a full time, part time or ad-hoc basis, can be physically exhausting, emotionally challenging, stressful and financially difficult. Many Kinship carers feel they have limited support and are not only worried about the children they are caring for but are also concerned for the parents themselves.

Citizens Advice Scotland

Citizens Advice Scotland has a confidential Kinship Care Advice service which can assist kinship carers with impartial and free advice.

To access this service, contact a local CARF office or call the **specialist helpline on 0808 800 0006**.

Citizens Advice and Rights Fife (CARF)

16 East Fergus Place

Kirkcaldy KY1 1XT

T: 0345 1400 095

or

Citizens Advice and Rights Fife (CARF)

10 - 12 Pentland Court Saltire Centre

Glenrothes KY6 2DA

T: 0345 1400 095



Taking the next step

For support and further information available in Fife or Tayside please contact:

FASS Alcohol Support Service

Call us in confidence on

01592 206200

Access online help and support

www.fassaction.org.uk

[f](#) @FASSFife | [t](#) @FASSFife

Tayside Council on Alcohol

Call us in confidence on

01382 456012

Access online help and support

www.alcoholtayside.com

Other National information and support can be accessed through the following organisations:

Alcohol Focus Scotland

www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk

Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol & Drugs

Helpline: 08080 101011 | www.sfad.org.uk

Al-Anon

Helpline: 0800 086 811

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