



Worried About Someone's Alcohol and Other Drug Use

Support for families, friends and carers



Alcohol or drug use by someone you care about can be confusing, stressful and overwhelming, but you are not alone, support is available.

A recent national study found that 48% of Australians were negatively affected by someone else's drinking in the past year – experiencing emotional harm, family conflict, financial strain or even physical danger¹. Many people find themselves supporting someone whose alcohol or other drug use impacts their wellbeing.

This factsheet is designed to help you understand what you can do to support someone with an alcohol or other drug issue, how to stay safe, and where to find support.

Looking After Yourself While Supporting Someone Else

The most important thing to remember is that people cannot change unless they want to. You are not responsible for someone else's choices or behaviour.

Your key responsibility is to **look after your wellbeing and keep yourself safe.**

- You do not have to do anything that makes you uncomfortable or unsafe.
- Setting and maintaining boundaries protects your wellbeing and can also help the person you care about.
- If you are affected by, or witness violence, leave immediately and seek help from police or a domestic violence service.
- **Violence is never OK**, regardless of alcohol or drug use.

Seeking support for yourself is absolutely OK. Many services can help you and your family navigate this difficult situation. Visit alwf.org.au/support for a list of help services.

How Do I Know If Someone May Be Using Alcohol or Other Drugs?

You might notice changes such as:

- Mood swings or personality changes
- Sleeping pattern changes
- Changes in spending or unexplained financial pressure
- Taking more risks than usual
- Finding substances or drug-taking equipment
- Behaviours that worry you or seem out of character

These signs can also relate to stress, mental health challenges, or physical health issues – not only alcohol or drug use. It's normal to feel unsure or concerned when you notice these changes.

If you're worried, you may choose to talk with the person – the next section offers tips on how to start that conversation safely and respectfully.



The Tune In Not Out video “**Helping someone who may have a drinking problem**” has great information on supporting someone safely. **Scan the QR code to watch.**



How Do I Start the Conversation?

Choose a time when:

- Everyone is calm
- There is privacy
- No one is intoxicated
- You feel safe

Use respectful, non-judgemental language:

- “I’m worried about you because...”
- “I’ve noticed some changes and I’m worried about you. Are you OK?”
- “Is there anything you’re finding hard at the moment?”

Often the best approach is to ask directly and gently, and let them know you care:



If they don’t want to talk, that’s OK. Your support can still make a difference.

What Is My Role? What Can I Do?

Look after yourself and anyone else in your care

Your wellbeing and safety come first. Supporting someone else’s alcohol or drug use can be emotionally exhausting and, at times, unsafe. It is OK to set boundaries, take breaks, and seek support for yourself. Children and others who depend on you need your stability and safety.

Get informed

Understanding alcohol and other drugs can help you feel more prepared. Speaking with your GP or contacting a local AOD service is a good first step.

Offer support

Sometimes the best support is simply listening and staying connected. Only offer support that feels safe, healthy and manageable for you.

Help them get help

Ask whether they have sought help before, and if they’re open to accessing support. They may not know where to begin – and that’s OK.

You can offer to:

- Find services
- Make appointments
- Attend appointments with them (if appropriate)

But remember – the decision to change is theirs, not yours.

What Should I Expect?

For Them:

Every situation is different. People may:

- Want to reduce or stop
- Not be ready yet
- Use recreationally and take steps to stay safe
- Develop dependence and need professional support

Recovery often involves steps forward and backwards. Relapse is common and does not mean failure.

For You:

Supporting someone can be emotionally draining. It’s OK to:

- Step back when you need to
- Set limits
- Seek help for yourself

AOD treatment services can provide guidance on substances, withdrawal, treatment pathways, and how to support someone safely.

You are not alone. Support is available – for both you and the person you care about.

Visit alwf.org.au/support for help and information.