

Supporting a Loved One with Addiction



Understanding Substance Use Disorder

**01**

Addiction is a Chronic Medical & Mental Illness

Substance use disorder (SUD) is a chronic brain condition, not a moral failure or lack of willpower. It alters brain chemistry, affecting judgment, impulse control, and decision-making. Like diabetes or heart disease, SUD requires ongoing medical care, compassion, and support – not shame or punishment.

02

Addiction is a Family Disease

Addiction doesn't affect just one person – it reshapes the entire family. Loved ones often experience anxiety, grief, guilt, frustration and exhaustion. Recognizing that the whole family is impacted is the first step toward healing together and building a path forward rooted in understanding and hope.

*It is never too late to **START RECOVERY**. It's one step and one day at a time.*

Support Starts with Love

L

Loving Phrases

- "I love you and I'm here for you." "You don't have to face this alone." "I'm proud of you for taking steps forward." "What can I do to support you today?" "I believe in your ability to heal."

O

Be Objective

- Understand that you cannot control their behavior. If their goal is sobriety, let them know it probably seems overwhelming, but they can overcome addiction with the right treatment and support.

V

Vulnerability of Both Parties

- Express how they must be feeling vulnerable and scared right now, and that's ok. Treatment is vital to their recovery from this disease. I will be your support of good choices every step of the way. Come from a place of love, not blame or frustration. It's ok to let your loved one know that you are feeling scared too and it all comes from a place of deep love.

E

Empathy Opens Doors

- Give your full attention without interrupting. Validate their feelings without judgment. Sit with silence – it shows you care. Reflect back what you hear: "It sounds like you're feeling..." Empathy opens doors that lectures close. It's important to continue to separate the disease from the person so your loved one feels valued.

What to Say & What to Avoid

The Most Important Thing to Remember

Your loved one is not their addiction. The behaviors caused by addiction may be painful, dishonest, or destructive, but the person underneath is still worthy of dignity, compassion, and hope. You can love someone deeply while refusing to enable their addiction.

Instead of Saying...	Try Saying...	Why It Helps
You're choosing drugs and/or alcohol over your family.	I know addiction is affecting your decisions, and I miss the person you are.	Separates the disease from the individual.
You've ruined your life.	No matter where you are today, recovery is possible.	Instills hope instead of despair.
You'll never change.	I believe you can recover, and I know it will take time.	Encourages resilience and motivation.
You're selfish.	I know addiction changes behavior, but I still care about you.	Reduces shame while maintaining compassion.
If you loved us, you would quit.	I know you love us, and I know addiction is powerful. Let's get help together.	Recognizes love while encouraging treatment.
I'm done with you.	I love you, but I cannot support behaviors that harm you or our family.	Combines healthy boundaries with unconditional love.
You're hopeless.	I've seen people recover, and I believe you can too.	Restores optimism and possibility.
You always lie.	Trust can be rebuilt through honesty, consistent actions and good choices.	Focuses on rebuilding rather than condemning.
You're an addict.	You are a person living with Substance Use Disorder disease.	Uses person-first language that respects dignity.

Lying is Part of The Disease

Understanding Dishonesty Through the Lens of Addiction

Lying is one of the most painful experiences for friends & families and those affected by Substance Use Disorder (SUD). Dealing with dishonesty, broken promises, hidden substance use, secretive behavior, and repeated lies can damage relationships and destroy trust. Many people begin to wonder if they ever really knew the person they love.

While lying should never be excused or accepted without accountability, it is important to understand that dishonesty is often a symptom of addiction rather than a reflection of a person's true character.

Addiction is a disease that thrives in secrecy, denial, and continued compulsion to use. As the illness progresses, protecting access to drugs or alcohol can become more important than maintaining honesty with loved ones.



Healthy Boundaries: Helping vs. Enabling and How to Set Limits with Love.



Understanding the Difference

● **Helping vs. Enabling:** Helping supports your loved one's recovery and well-being. Enabling protects them from the natural consequences of their addiction, allowing the disease to continue unchecked.

Signs You May Be Enabling: Covering up mistakes, making excuses, providing money that funds substance use, or taking over responsibilities your loved one has abandoned.

Why It Matters: Enabling, though driven by love, can delay a loved one's decision to seek treatment. Recognizing the difference is one of the most powerful steps a family can take.

Setting Limits While Maintaining Love

● **Define Your Boundaries Clearly:** Identify specific behaviors you will and will not accept. Boundaries are not punishments – they are commitments you make to protect your own well-being and support recovery.

Communicate with Compassion: Use calm, non-accusatory language. Express your love while being firm about the limits you have set. Consistency is key to making boundaries effective.

Practical Boundary Strategies: Stop providing financial support that enables use. Decline to lie or make excuses on their behalf. Seek guidance from a counselor or support group to help you hold boundaries without guilt or resentment.

Signs Your Loved One Needs Help



> Physical Warning Signs

- Weight changes
- Extreme Fatigue
- Vomiting
- Shaking or Tremors
- Nose Bleeds
- Track marks
- Seizures

> Behavioral Changes

- Mood Swings
- Irritability and Anger
- Anxiety, Nervousness & Depression
- Unpredictable reactions & actions

> Social Withdrawal

- Decline invitations
- Always Alone
- Avoid Phone Calls
- Cancels Plans Last Minute
- Stops Attending Gatherings

> Work & School Problems

- Not showing Up
- Getting Fired
- Arriving Late
- Increased Mistakes
- Poor Decision Making
- Calling In Sick

> Financial Difficulties

- Missing Cash
- Unauthorized Credit Card Use
- Forged Checks
- Always Asking for Money
- Pawning Valuables
- Theft

> Legal Issues

- DUI(s)
- Arrests
- Domestic Charges
- Assault Charges
- Fraud
- Possession

Recognizing when a loved one needs professional treatment is a critical first step. Warning signs include sudden weight loss, bloodshot eyes, changes in sleep patterns, secrecy, mood swings, withdrawing from family and friends, neglecting responsibilities, unexplained financial problems, and a decline in physical or mental health. Trust your instincts – early intervention saves lives.

Overdose Warning Signs and How to Respond

Recognizing a Crisis

An overdose is a medical emergency. **Call 911 immediately** if you observe: unconsciousness or unresponsiveness, slow, shallow, or stopped breathing, choking or gurgling sounds, blue or grayish lips or fingertips, pinpoint (very small) pupils, or a limp body.

Naloxone (Narcan) can reverse an opioid overdose and is available without a prescription at most pharmacies. If you suspect an opioid overdose, administer naloxone, call 911, and stay with the person until help arrives. Do not leave them alone.

Stay as calm as possible. **Place the person on their side to prevent choking**, and continue to monitor their breathing. More than one dose of naloxone may be needed. Call 911. Your quick action can save a life.



Supporting Recovery

How to encourage treatment and be a supportive presence.

- Recovery is a journey, not a destination. Encourage your loved one by expressing hope without pressure – say "I believe in you" rather than issuing ultimatums. Help them access treatment by researching options together, offering rides to appointments, and removing barriers where you can. Celebrate small milestones and understand that setbacks are part of the process, not signs of failure.



Remind your loved one that they have an actual disease called Substance Use Disorder, just like high blood pressure or diabetes and it requires treatment.

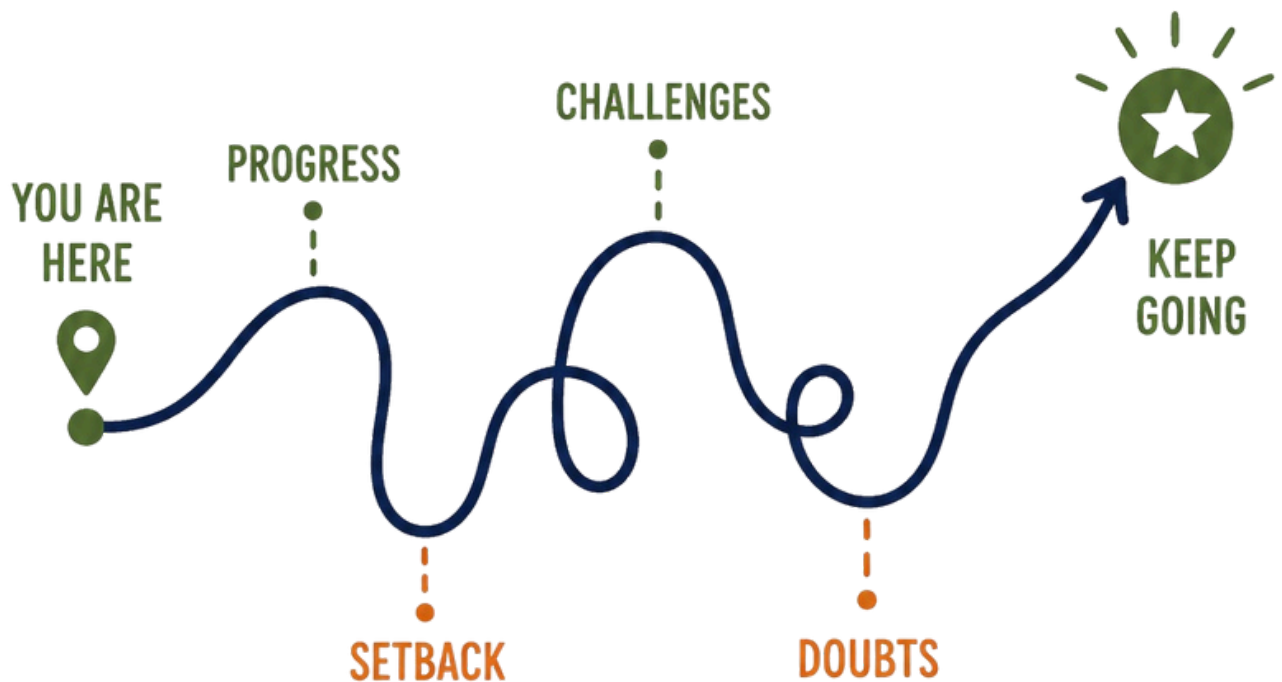
What to expect during the recovery journey and staying present without taking control.

- Recovery looks different for everyone and rarely follows a straight path. Expect emotional highs and lows, and prepare yourself for the possibility of relapse – it does not mean all progress is lost. Your role is to offer steady, compassionate support without taking ownership of their recovery. Attend family therapy or support groups like Al-Anon to strengthen your own resilience. Maintain your boundaries, practice self-care, and remember: your well-being matters too. A healthy, grounded family is one of the most powerful forces in lasting recovery.

RECOVERY

— *is not a* —

STRAIGHT LINE



THERE WILL BE UPS & DOWNS



THERE WILL BE DETOURS



BUT EVERY STEP FORWARD MATTERS

Supporting a Loved One After a Relapse

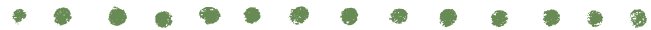
When Recovery Takes a Step Back

Hearing that your loved one has relapsed can be heartbreaking. You may feel disappointed, angry, frightened, or even betrayed. After all the effort, treatment, meetings, and hope, it can feel like everything has been lost.

But here's something every family needs to understand: **A relapse does not erase recovery.**

Recovery is rarely a straight line. Many people who have been sober for years will tell you they experienced setbacks before finding lasting recovery. A relapse doesn't mean treatment failed or that your loved one doesn't want to get better. It means something in their recovery plan needs attention.

The most important question isn't, *"Why did you relapse?"*
Instead, ask, *"What happened, and what can we learn from this?"*
That shift in perspective can make all the difference.



Remember What Your Loved One Is Feeling

Most people who relapse are not celebrating.

They're often overwhelmed by shame.

They know they've disappointed the people they love.

They may feel like they've failed themselves.

Many are terrified that no one will believe in them anymore.

Shame is one of addiction's most powerful weapons. It tells people they are beyond hope and that there is no point in trying again.

Families have the opportunity to interrupt that lie with compassion and accountability.

Supporting a Loved One After a Relapse

What Families Should Do After a Relapse

Stay calm. Take a deep breath before reacting.

Responding with anger in the first few minutes rarely helps. Instead, focus on safety. If your loved one appears intoxicated, is having trouble breathing, talking about suicide, or experiencing a medical emergency, seek immediate medical attention.

Once everyone is safe, encourage honesty.

Let your loved one know you appreciate the truth, even when it is painful to hear.

Next, encourage action. Help them reconnect with their sponsor, a friend in recovery, a counselor, treatment provider, or recovery support system as soon as possible.

The sooner someone returns to treatment or support, the better their chances of getting back on track.

Try to remember that sobriety is one day at a time. Tell someone they don't have to worry about not drinking for 20 years, they need to focus on not drinking today.



Don't Assume All Progress Is Lost

Think about learning to ride a bicycle.

If you fall, you don't forget how to ride.

Recovery works much the same way.

Your loved one still has the tools they learned in treatment.

They still know what healthy coping skills look like.

They still have experience living sober.

The goal now is to understand what led to the relapse and strengthen the recovery plan moving forward.



Supporting a Loved One After a Relapse

What Not to Say vs. What to Say - Words Matter After Relapse!

Instead of Saying...	Try Saying This...
"I knew this would happen."	"I'm glad you told me. Let's figure out the next step together."
"You ruined everything."	"This setback doesn't erase the progress you've made."
"You'll never change."	"Recovery is still possible, and I believe you can get back on track."
"You lied to us again."	"Thank you for being honest. Honesty is the first step toward rebuilding trust."
"I can't believe you did this."	"Help me understand what happened."
"You're hopeless."	"You're struggling right now, but you are not beyond help."
"I don't trust you anymore."	"Trust will take time to rebuild, and I'm willing to let your actions guide the process."
"You obviously didn't want recovery."	"Something made recovery difficult. Let's identify what support you need."
"This is your last chance."	"The next decision you make can move you back toward recovery."

Supporting a Loved One After a Relapse

Healthy Support Doesn't Mean Removing Consequences

One of the hardest things friends and families learn is that supporting recovery does not mean rescuing someone from every consequence.

You can love your loved one without paying every bill.

You can encourage treatment without making excuses for missed work.

You can offer a ride to detox without giving money that may support substance use.

Healthy support says: "I will walk beside you, but I cannot walk the journey for you."



Remember That Families Need Healing Too

Relapse affects everyone.

It's okay to feel disappointed.

It's okay to feel frustrated.

It's okay to protect your own emotional health.

Continue attending family support groups, counseling, or Al-Anon and open AA meetings can be helpful.

Your healing is just as important as your loved one's recovery.



Hope Is Stronger Than Relapse

A relapse is not the end of the story.

It is a chapter—not the entire book.

Many people in long-term recovery experienced one or more relapses before achieving lasting sobriety. What often made the difference was not perfection, but the willingness to ask for help, return to treatment, and keep moving forward.

Recovery is built one day, one decision, and one act of courage at a time. With the right support, today's setback can become tomorrow's comeback.

CELEBRATE

— Milestones IN RECOVERY

 Family. Loved Ones. Support. Pride. 
Your hard work. Our celebration.

Every milestone is a reminder of strength,
growth, and the life you're building.

30 DAYS



A NEW
BEGINNING

90 DAYS



STRONGER
EVERY DAY

6 MONTHS



GROWTH.
CHANGE.
HOPE.

1 YEAR



ONE YEAR
OF COURAGE,
COMMITMENT &
NEW POSSIBILITIES

& BEYOND

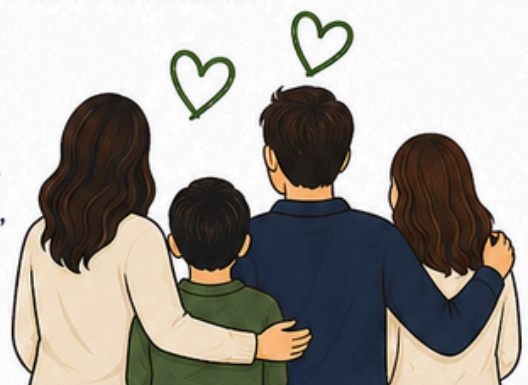


THE BEST
IS STILL
AHEAD

Whenever
you find yourself doubting
how far you can go just
 Remember
how far you have COME.
everything you have FACED.
all the battles you have WON.
and all the fears you have
OVERCOME.

A MOMENTO OF ACCOMPLISHMENT.

A reminder of the journey,
the love that supports you,
and the bright road ahead.



There Is Always Hope for Recovery



Recovery Is Possible — For Your Loved One and Your Family ✓

Recovery from substance use disorder is real, lasting, and within reach. Millions of people have found their way back to health, connection, and purpose — and families have healed alongside them.

Research shows that with proper treatment and support, more than one-third of people with addiction have no further symptoms after one year. Long-term recovery rates continue to improve with ongoing care, community, and family involvement.

Your love, your boundaries, and your commitment to your own well-being are not wasted. They are part of the foundation that makes recovery possible. Hope is not just a feeling — it is a choice you make every day, and it changes everything. Don't give up!

We're Here to Help

Recovery Begins with Connection and Community

At Willo Recovery Network, we believe that lasting recovery is built on connection, accountability, and hope. Whether you are just beginning your sobriety journey or have years of recovery behind you, surrounding yourself with a supportive community can make all the difference. We proudly support sobriety, recovery housing, and the ongoing growth that comes from living one day at a time.

Our website includes helpful links to Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA), and Al-Anon Family Groups, making it easier for individuals and families to find meetings, build relationships, and access peer support. If you live in the Chicagoland area, we invite you to explore the programs and resources offered by Willo Recovery Network. From recovery education and community connections to purpose-driven programming and support for families, our mission is to help individuals not only achieve sobriety but build meaningful, fulfilling lives in recovery. No matter where you are on your journey, know that healing is possible, hope is real, and you never have to walk the path alone.

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