

Loving Someone with a Substance Use Disorder
By Jennie Geltz, MSW, LCSW

Substance problems is often hard not only on the person using the substances but also on the partner or family members who love that person. In order to have that person in your life you often need to look at ways to keep yourself safe and healthy. Here are a some ways you can do that.

Educate Yourself.

Gaining knowledge will prepare you with info when your family member is ready for help. Consider Narcan training, learn about risk factors for addiction or learn about recovery options.

Be Patient.

Sometimes people achieve long-term recovery on their first attempt at sobriety but many struggle with relapse. Recovery can take multiple attempts or years to gain. Either way remember “Recovery is possible”!

Practice Self Care.

You can't help your family member if you are struggling. Maintain healthy routines including regular meals and sleep schedule.

Set Boundaries.

Create strong limits about what you will and will not tolerate from your loved one, limiting feelings or frustrations. Ex: No phone calls or text messages when the person is intoxicated, or No drugs or alcohol in the house.

Get Outside Input.

Drug and alcohol problems continue to carry stigma and it can cause secrecy and shame. It is important to find help in community early and often. Find a support group (ex: Al-Anon) or talk to a therapist.

Consider other behavioral health problems.

The likelihood of mental illness diagnosis doubles for individuals suffering from substance use disorders. Look for concerning symptoms and seek professional guidance. Some people are more likely to seek treatment for mental health than substance problems.

Stay Safe.

If you feel you are in danger, your kids are in danger, or your relationship is just not healthy you might need to consider alternatives such as ending a relationship or living separately until the person can work on their own recovery. Family

therapy is a wonderful way to assist the family in healing once the person is sober and ready to work on outside relationships.

The strategies listed above can create safer and healthier interactions with your loved one dealing with a substance use problem. Working on these things can help you maintain your wellness along this path to recovery. Remember, Recovery is Possible, even for the family!

**Jennie sees clients out of the Sandwich office*