

Partners' Guide to Substance Misuse

Supporting someone you love without losing yourself

Living alongside a partner's alcohol or drug misuse can change the emotional atmosphere of a relationship. Love can sit beside anger, fear, mistrust, exhaustion and hope. This guide is written specifically for partners — because you need support in your own right, not only advice about how to help the person using substances.

Your experience matters

You may be monitoring moods, money, whereabouts or signs of intoxication; covering responsibilities; losing sleep; or questioning what is true. These are significant pressures. You do not have to minimise their impact simply because your partner is struggling too.

Talk when the moment is safer

Where possible, choose a time when your partner is sober and relatively calm. Describe what you have observed and how it affects you rather than arguing over labels. Be clear about what you are asking for: an assessment, honesty about money, treatment contact, or a safety change.

Boundaries in a partnership

A boundary is not a threat designed to force recovery. It is a statement about what you will do to protect yourself. This may involve finances, substances in the home, driving, aggression, childcare, lying to other people or what you will no longer cover up.

Love is not the same as rescuing

Repeatedly paying debts, phoning employers, making excuses or absorbing every consequence can leave you carrying the addiction. Where possible, direct help towards treatment, safety, food, transport or appointments rather than removing every consequence.

Trust and intimacy

Substance misuse can damage emotional and sexual intimacy. Rebuilding trust normally requires consistent behaviour over time, not promises made during a crisis. Couples support may be useful when it is safe and both people are able to participate.

Your own support plan

Keep people around you who know what is happening. Protect access to money and important documents where necessary. Consider your own counselling or family-support service. If there is coercion, threats or violence, prioritise safety and specialist support.

A practical support plan

You cannot do recovery for somebody else, but you can decide how you will respond.

What I am most worried about	
What is within my control	
What is not within my control	
My financial / home boundaries	
Who I can speak to	
What I will do in a crisis	
One thing I need for myself	

Books that may help

Beyond Addiction

Jeffrey Foote et al.

A compassionate, evidence-informed family approach.

Get Your Loved One Sober

Robert J. Meyers & Brenda L. Wolfe

Practical CRAFT-informed strategies for loved ones affected by alcohol problems.

Codependent No More

Melody Beattie

A widely read book about boundaries and becoming less consumed by another person's behaviour; take what is useful without treating 'codependency' as a diagnosis.

Help and information

NHS / GP	Ask about local drug and alcohol treatment and family support.
FRANK	Drug information and support: 0300 123 6600.
Adfam	Support for people affected by someone else's drinking, drug use or gambling.
Addiction Family Support	Family helpline: 0300 888 3853.
SMART Family & Friends	Peer meetings and practical tools for affected family and friends.

If there is immediate danger, serious violence, collapse, suspected overdose, seizure, severe breathing difficulty or an acute mental-health crisis, seek urgent help. In the UK, call 999 when life is at risk.

Support Hub educational resource — not a replacement for individual medical, safeguarding, legal or emergency advice.