

TOP TIPS

What Helps Us *Family members share their experience*

When it comes to dealing with a loved one's addiction, there's no one-size-fits-all solution. But family members have a wealth of experience on how to respond, rather than react, in the face of challenging behaviour. Here are some of their top tips.

INFLUENCE

'It's often said that you can't change the substance user. But you CAN influence. When you change how you respond to manipulative, controlling, secretive and/or destructive behaviour, that can create a chain reaction which can lead to the substance user getting help.'

MORE THAN ENOUGH

'I constantly felt like I was not doing enough. I was desperate to fix it, to stop him using. It helped me when I realised that it's not all in my control and what I'm doing IS enough. It's more than enough.'

SHAME

'I try not to add to her shame. Substance users often already feel very ashamed. I felt shame too, that we had that happening in the family. But shame is so destructive. Try not to add to the shame that's already there.'

HONESTY

'Be honest about your emotions but don't impose them on your loved one. Sometimes I feel angry, sad and hurt. I try not to lash out, but saying it calmly and honestly is important. I hope that in some way it makes it easier for her to be honest with me too.'

THAT'S INTERESTING

'Condemning, criticising and poking the finger doesn't get you anywhere. Now, if they tell me they've used or relapsed I try to respond neutrally, without anger. Expressing interest helps them open up and makes it feel like we can work together rather than pulling in opposite directions.'

DISTORTED THINKING

'People who've used substances are not thinking straight. They may look the same on the outside but inside everything has changed. Realising their thinking is distorted made me realise that the way they treat me is not personal. Addiction just makes people selfish, that's how it works.'

GUILT

'You feel guilty if you help, and guilty if you don't. They ask for money and you know they're desperate and worry what they'll do to get it if you don't help, but giving them money means fuelling the habit. You're stuck between a rock and a hard place and you justify the strangest things. Take a step back. Don't get sucked in. They have to feel the consequences of their actions. You can't protect them, it only makes it worse.'

Adfam wishes to thank family members in Greenwich for offering their time and words of expertise.