



**Making it Happen:
Support for families and
carers affected by someone
else's drug or alcohol use**

Guide Refresher

Making It Happen: Good Practice Guide Refresher

This quick read 'Refresher' is based on the Adfam Good Practice Guide, 'Making It Happen'.

Why Adfam?

Adfam have been the voice of the family for over 30 years. In that time we have developed a network of forums across England that keeps us in touch with the grassroots experiences of family members, carers and frontline workers. Drawing on this and on our research into 'what works', Adfam produces good practice guides, toolkits and resources for the substance misuse sector and beyond. As the sector experts for this work, Adfam is well placed to say what good family support looks like.

What we've learned

- Families are often the unheard and unseen victims when a loved one uses drugs or alcohol.
- Substance misuse affects the health and wellbeing of everyone in the family but may be particularly damaging to children.
- Families of drug and alcohol users often won't think of themselves as carers. Even if they provide emotional, financial and practical support, at great cost to their own health and well-being, they will not identify with generic carers services and support.
- Good quality, well designed services for the families of drug and alcohol users really work. The benefits are far-reaching, improving the lives of family members, the wider community and the drug and alcohol users themselves.
- A well supported family is able to help and support a loved one to access, maintain and successfully complete treatment.

The basics of Family Support

1. **Support families to support the substance misuser.** Families are a key component of 'Recovery Capital'. For many people with drug or alcohol issues, it is the family that helps them recognise they have a problem, encourages them to seek help and sustains them through their recovery journey. Supporting the family, supports recovery.
2. **Support families in their own right.** It is important to recognise that family members need support whether or not the substance misuser is prepared to accept help. Acknowledging this and providing a service even if the substance misuser is outside treatment demonstrates to families that they are more than just someone else's 'recovery capital'. Supporting families to support themselves delivers many benefits.
3. **Make families feel welcome.** Family members want the same warm, supportive, 'client-centred' approach that we expect for substance misusing clients. It can take a lot of courage for a family to reach out for help. Giving families the space and time to talk and be heard, in a supportive, non-judgemental environment is vital.
4. **Recognise that different families have different needs.** Just as individual treatment journey's have to be responsive to individual circumstances, families also look for something that's sensitive to their particular needs. Specific information, programmes or interventions may be offered but it is important to recognise that those experiencing high levels of stress often struggle to engage straight away. Models of support must be flexible enough, and staff well trained enough, to recognise this and adapt accordingly. Services understand that drug and alcohol users may face additional barriers and the same considerations around language, culture, age, sexuality and gender should be extended to families.
5. **Involve family members in service design.** Drug and alcohol services routinely involve clients in the design of their services. Adfam wants to see the same approach to the design of family services.

Key features of good family services

1. **One-to-one sessions with trained practitioners.** Whilst group support approaches are important, Adfam advocates that every family member should be able to access one-to-one support. Trained, skilled Practitioners play a pivotal role in providing help, information and guidance to clients. One-to-one support meetings complement the delivery of group interventions and help individuals apply what they've learned to their own circumstances.
2. **High quality information and guidance.** Families frequently face a range of challenges other than just substance misuse, including debt, difficulties at school and work, mental and physical ill health, isolation and, sometimes, domestic violence, abuse or neglect. Family services need to be able to identify these problems and supportively signpost families into specialist services.
3. **Easy access to facilitated Peer support.** Peer support is invaluable. It reduces isolation, helps overcome stigma and shame, supports problem-solving and can gently challenge unhelpful responses in a safe, supportive environment. Peer support groups should be facilitated by someone with appropriate training and supervision. Group members and other peer support volunteers can be supported to co-lead groups over time but Adfam recommends that a trained practitioner should lead groups. Adfam's peer support pathway has been developed specifically for family members affected by someone else's substance use and is the basis for training family members.

What do families want to know?

- **Drug and alcohol Education.** Families become anxious when they don't know the basic facts about the substances their loved one is taking. Answering, for example, simple questions about drug paraphernalia and the effects of different drugs on the body helps to relieve that anxiety.
- **Staying Safe.** With uncertainty about substances can come misjudgements about when and how to intervene. This can put family members at risk of harm.
- **Naloxone.** Most local authorities now have Naloxone programmes which make this life-saving opioid overdose-reversing drug available to drug users. Family members of those

at risk of overdose can be supplied with and trained in the use of Naloxone. Making families aware of this and providing them with training and Naloxone kits is a crucial aspect of family support. Visit www.prenoxadoinjection.com for more information.

- **Treatment options.** Family members can have wildly unrealistic – and even unsafe – perceptions of treatment. Educating them on what is available and what is effective is very important if they are to help, not hinder, their loved one’s journey.
- **Understanding Recovery.** Helping family members understand what is involved in successful recovery enables them to play a supportive role and gives them the best chance to build a positive future together.

Helping families cope

- **Enabling.** Family members often inadvertently enable substance use, protecting loved ones from its consequences, giving them money or supporting them in other ways which makes the substance use easy to perpetuate. Sometimes families are unaware that they are doing this, or are aware but are scared of what might happen if they stop. Guiding and supporting them as they make decisions is crucial.
- **Boundaries.** Family members often struggle to see clearly how - and how not – to get involved with their loved one’s life. Especially where a teenager or young adult is the substance user, knowing when to intervene and when to allow natural consequences can be challenging. Some carers also need support to re-establish their own boundaries and ‘get their life back’.
- **Managing Conflict.** Families affected by substance use typically experience a lot of conflict. Simple tips and skills to de-escalate and manage conflict can improve life for everyone.
- **Positive Communication.** Negative communication patterns, often developed over many years, can lead to unhealthy cycles of behaviour and damage relationships. Guidance and skills to improve communication can transform family relationships.
- **Self-care and personal wellbeing.** Life for family members often becomes consumed by their loved one’s drug or alcohol use. They can need encouragement and support to re-

establish social networks, hobbies, work or volunteering. Stigma and shame can make it difficult for family members to initiate these steps without support.

Adfam can support you with local needs assessments, service mapping, outcome monitoring, consultancy and training packages. See adfam.org.uk or email admin@adfam.org.uk for further details.

Adfam has drawn up a checklist to help you highlight areas you may want to investigate further.

Self-Assessment checklist

1. We have a service which provides one-to-one specialised support to all family members, regardless of whether their loved one is in treatment or known to services.
2. The one-to-one support we provide is responsive and not just a brief intervention with no ongoing provision.
3. The support we provide includes signposting and referrals to other appropriate services such as housing, debt advice, training and employment, domestic violence, mental health etc.
4. Practitioners are well informed about and well networked with the local services to whom they provide referrals and signposting.
5. Practitioners have received training in supporting family members affected by substance misuse (such as the training Adfam provides) and are well equipped and skilled in the job that they do.
6. We have a service which provides information and/or training to family members on important topics such as staying safe, naloxone, enabling, communicating within the family, self-care etc.
7. Information is provided to family members in a variety of ways including one to one and group meetings.
8. Information is available in formats that are accessible to different families.
9. Family members are supported to explore how information relates to them and apply it to their situation through discussions of family dynamics, exploring options for addressing the substance use with their loved one etc.

10. We have mechanisms for family members to get involved in supporting others through peer support training or volunteering programmes.
11. There are informal opportunities for family members to support their peers, such as peer support groups.
12. There is a peer support group for family members affected by someone else's substance use.
13. Peer support is recognised, supported and resourced as a part of our family provision.
14. Those who provide peer support are themselves supported by professionals; they receive appropriate supervision and are not just 'left to their own devices'.
15. Our treatment provider has a 'whole family approach', recognising the importance of families and engaging them effectively to support recovery.
16. There are clear protocols in place to involve families without compromising clients' confidentiality and all staff are trained and have a clear understanding of this.
17. Our carers centre makes provision for carers of those who use substances. This includes training for staff so that they recognise and can support the needs of this particular carer group.
18. All relevant services are aware of one another and are well networked with effective information sharing protocols around family members affected by substance use. Referral pathways are in place and are working effectively.
19. I am able to delineate the level of funds within our budgets which is allocated to supporting family members affected by substance use.
20. There is clear information available online and in community locations so that any family member worried about a loved one's substance use could find information about our service and know that it is available to them.
21. Families are involved in the design of services and can feedback on effectiveness.
22. Families are included in our 'Needs Assessments'.