



How to cope with a family member's problem drinking

When the situation is very difficult, it can be hard to imagine a different life. But change is possible, for you and the person drinking.

There are ways to cope better when someone close to you is drinking in a harmful way. Building your coping skills and asking for help will make a difference.

Look after your own needs

Family members living with dependent drinkers often neglect themselves. They can be too busy looking after the other person or taking on extra responsibilities.

Remember:

- you did not cause it
- you cannot control it
- you cannot cure it

Put yourself and others affected first.

Make sure you and others affected:

- ask for help
- get enough sleep
- eat well
- take time away from the problems, even by going for a walk or visiting a friend

Recognise that harmful drinking affects you too

You may experience violence or financial problems.

But there may also be less obvious effects, such as:

- missing sleep
- feeling worn out, afraid, anxious or resentful

Try to recognise and express your feelings.

Keep yourself and others safe from harm

Contact the Child and Family Agency - tusla.ie (Link: <https://www.tusla.ie/children-first/parents-and-guardians/how-do-i-report-a-concern-about-a-child/>) if you are worried that a child may have been, is being, or is at risk of being abused or neglected.

Women's Aid (Link: <http://womensaid.ie>) provide confidential information and support to women who are being abused. Call their national helpline on freephone 1800 341 900 (Link: tel:1800 341 900).

Call 112 or 999 immediately if:

- you experience violence or abuse, or a threat of these

Know that you're not to blame

You may blame yourself for the problem or for not being able to solve it.

You may feel responsible when their drinking affects family members or causes problems.

Examples include:

- financial worries
- feeling you are letting others down
- feeling you have failed in the relationship

Do not feel you have to solve the problem

As much as you may want to, and as hard as it is to watch, you cannot make someone stop drinking.

There are things you can do to help and support (Link: <https://www2.hse.ie/living-well/alcohol/coping-difficult-situations/help-a-family-member-who-is-dependent-on-alcohol/>) the person. But in the end, the choice to try to change the harmful drinking is theirs.

Learn about dependence and recovery

Understanding alcohol dependence and recovery can make you feel more in control.

Your GP can talk to you about alcohol dependence and advise you about recovering from alcohol dependence.

Alcohol dependence (Link: <https://www2.hse.ie/living-well/alcohol/dependence/>)

Talk to other people

Living with a dependent or problem drinker can make you feel isolated.

You may feel ashamed to talk about it or feel that you are the only person going through these problems.

You do not need to feel ashamed. Alcohol dependency affects many families from every social class, race and culture.

It can be a relief to talk to other people, particularly people going through the same thing.

There are support groups for families (Link: <https://www2.hse.ie/living-well/alcohol/coping-difficult-situations/services-for-families/>) coping with alcohol dependency.

You can also turn to trusted friends, a therapist, or other resources in your community.

Get help with problem alcohol use

Freephone 1800 459 459 (Link: [tel:1800 459 459](tel:1800459459)) for confidential advice



Find alcohol services and supports (Link: <https://www2.hse.ie/living-well/alcohol/alcohol-services/>)

If you have children

How to help your children:

- Arrange a weekly activity - for example, watching a movie, playing a game together or going to the park.
- Agree with the person drinking that they will not get drunk in front of the children.
- Arrange a sleepover with friends or family.
- Learn active listening techniques (Link: <https://www2.hse.ie/mental-health/helping-someone-else/being-a-good-listener/>) - these can help children talk about their feelings.
- Contact a family or young persons support service.

More in Coping with difficult situations (Link: </living-well/alcohol/coping-difficult-situations/>)

Types of treatment services (Link: </living-well/alcohol/coping-difficult-situations/services-types/>)

Support services for families (Link: </living-well/alcohol/coping-difficult-situations/services-for-families/>)

How to cope with a family member's problem drinking

Talking to someone about their problem drinking (Link: [/living-well/alcohol/coping-difficult-situations/how-to-talk-to-someone/](#))

How to help a family member who is dependent on alcohol (Link: [/living-well/alcohol/coping-difficult-situations/help-a-family-member-who-is-dependent-on-alcohol/](#))

Helping the child of a problem drinker (Link: [/living-well/alcohol/coping-difficult-situations/how-to-help-the-child-of-a-problem-drinker/](#))

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