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# How to Talk to an Alcoholic: How to Talk to Someone About Alcoholism

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If your loved one is struggling with alcohol use, it can be challenging to figure out how to help them. By educating yourself on alcohol use disorders, considering different ways of how to talk to your loved one, and making a plan for your conversation, you'll be better equipped to lend your support and get your loved one the help they need.

Remember: It may take more than one conversation with a person who has an alcohol use disorder to encourage them to seek help. However, by showing your support and concern, you may be able to help them to see they have a problem with alcohol and would benefit from addiction treatment.

## What you will learn:

- ✓ An explanation of alcohol use disorders.
- ✓ How to approach someone you think may have a drinking problem.
- ✓ How to offer assistance to someone misusing alcohol.
- ✓ How to take care of yourself while also helping someone with a drinking problem.

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## What is an Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD)?

Drinking becomes problematic when it affects a person's life to the point where they can no longer control their alcohol use. They continue to drink despite negative impacts it has on their life. When someone's drinking progresses to this extent, a person may have an alcohol use disorder.<sup>1</sup>

An [alcohol use disorder \(AUD\)](#) is a chronic but treatable condition that can develop in association with certain cognitive changes and physiological adaptations that can make it additionally difficult for a person to stop drinking—even if they want to.

### Alcohol Use Disorder Diagnostic Criteria

- Drinking more often or in higher amounts than originally intended.
- Expressing a desire to cut down or stop drinking but being unable to do so.
- Spending a lot of time drinking or recovering from drinking.
- Experiencing cravings, which means feeling the need to drink to the point that they cannot think of anything else.
- Being unable to meet responsibilities at work, home, or school because of their drinking.
- Continuing to drink even though it causes problems with family or friends.
- Stopping or cutting back time on spent on hobbies or other activities the person once enjoyed so they can drink.
- Getting into dangerous situations during or after drinking that increases their chances of harming themselves or someone else (such as drinking before or while driving).
- Continuing to drink even if they have a mental health disorder (such as depression or anxiety) or a physical health issue that is either caused by or worsened by drinking.
- Needing to drink more than they used to in order to feel the same effects of alcohol (i.e., tolerance).
- Having symptoms of withdrawal (such as sweating, insomnia, shakiness, racing heart, seizures) when they try to stop or significantly reduce drinking.

Consuming more than one drink a day (equivalent to a 12-ounce beer) for women and two drinks a day for men may be considered unhealthy.<sup>2</sup> Remember, only a physician can diagnose someone with an AUD. However, being aware of the signs of an AUD can help you prepare for your conversation with the person you suspect has a problem. To learn more about addiction, how it manifests, and its effects on society, view our [addiction statistics](#) page.

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## Signs of an Alcohol Use Disorder

You may notice certain physical changes in a loved one that could indicate that they have a problem with alcohol use. These physical signs may include bloodshot eyes, alcohol on their breath, sleeping more than usual or appearing tired, and/or an unsteady gait.<sup>3</sup>

You might also notice behavioral changes if your loved one has a problem with alcohol. For example, they may become frequently angry, belligerent, or moody for no apparent reason. They may appear intoxicated; become less interested in relationships, work activities, or schoolwork; or be unable to refuse an offer of alcohol.<sup>3</sup>

Sometimes, people struggling with alcohol misuse may begin telling lies or being secretive about their whereabouts, alcohol use, and more. You may notice that a person no longer provides consistent stories about their whereabouts, the people they're with, or what they are doing. These factors alone don't mean that a person has an AUD, but they may certainly be indicative of a problem with alcohol when accompanied by other telltale signs.<sup>3</sup>

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## What to Say to an Alcoholic

Now that you've learned more about AUDs, you may be able to better understand what your coworker, friend, family member, or other loved one is experiencing. However, you might not be ready for the emotionally taxing part of your conversation. This is where making a plan and writing down your ideas can be helpful.

- **Focus on your concern about your loved one's drinking.** Remember to use "I" statements that express your feelings and your concerns and the ways that you are impacted by your loved one's alcohol use. You could say, "I am concerned about your alcohol use. I've noticed that I'm increasingly worried when you come home late at night and I don't know where you've been."
- **Explain that you're worried about your loved one's health.** We suggest that you genuinely express your feelings to your loved one by saying something like "I'm concerned that drinking so much every day is harming your health. I've noticed that you're sleeping all day on the weekends."
- **Be empathetic and understanding.** Use empathetic, not blaming, statements such as "I know you've been having a hard time at work and you've been feeling more pressure" or "I know that you're feeling more stressed than usual."
- **Offer options instead of demands.** Present options by saying something along the lines of "I was wondering if you would consider seeing a doctor to talk about your alcohol use," instead of "You need to get help." Even though you think it's obvious that your loved one should seek help, it's always up to the person to decide what course of action is best for them. You can suggest they seek help, but you can't force someone to do something they're not ready to do.

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## What Not to Say to an Alcoholic

If you're afraid of saying the wrong thing entirely, it may help to speak to a therapist that specializes in addiction. You could offer your perception of the person struggling with alcohol misuse and ask for guidance or perhaps even role play with the therapist to work through potentially difficult scenarios and how you might deal with them.

- **Using terms such as “alcoholic” or “addict.”** These terms are outdated and stigmatizing, and those struggling with SUDs can become upset or defensive when they’re referred to by these labels. Plus, language like this perpetuates the idea that addiction is a moral failing—as opposed to a disease—and makes people less likely to listen to your suggestions. Instead, focus on the person and their behavior rather than the label.
- **Blaming and making accusations.** Shaming someone into treatment rarely works. Blaming someone for their condition often causes them to shut down and stop listening entirely.
- **Talking without listening.** It’s important to get your point across. But remember, this is a conversation not a lecture. Plus, it may take several conversations before the individual will actually enter treatment. Point is, you don’t have to say everything all at once, and it’s just as important to listen as it is to speak.
- **Speaking in generalizations.** Vague statements don’t have nearly as much of an impact as specific examples and direct requests. Point out specific behaviors that are troubling or suggest particular treatment options that may be helpful.
- **Blurting out your ideas.** Rather than having an off-the-cuff conversation, pick a time and place when both of you are calm and won’t be disturbed. Chances are the conversation will be more productive if both of you feel safe and comfortable.

## 4 More Supportive Steps

In addition to these considerations, there are some concrete actions you can take before and during confronting the person you know who is struggling with an AUD.

### Step 1: Seek Support

Seeking support for yourself through resources or therapy can help you feel like you’re not going through this challenge alone. These resources may provide additional strategies for addressing the person’s alcohol misuse problem and can also help you understand how to best approach your loved one.

There are many ways you can go about this. One idea is to talk to a therapist or mental health or substance abuse specialist to advise you on how to talk to your loved one about their alcohol use. You might consider reading articles, books, or websites, or accessing other free resources on AUDs, too.

### Step 2: Engage in Self-Care.

Taking care of yourself is important when you’re concerned for someone you love—yet it’s sometimes one of the first things people push aside. Unfortunately, if you feel burnt out, you’ll be less capable of providing love and support to your loved one.

Remember to seek your own social support during this stressful time. You could begin counseling or therapy with a mental health professional to discuss and process your feelings. Or, you might consider joining a support group for loved ones of people with alcohol use disorder, such as Al-Anon or SMART Recovery for Friends and Family.

These resources can also help you learn and remember the importance of setting healthy boundaries when dealing with someone with an AUD. Your needs are just as important as anyone else’s, and taking care of yourself doesn’t mean that you’re selfish or that you don’t care about your loved one.

If you love someone with an AUD, you may unknowingly engage in caretaking, rescuing, or enabling behaviors. You may experience what is known as codependency, or an unhealthy emotional reliance on your loved one. Talking to others (via a support group, for example) who have been in your position can help you develop healthier strategies to protect your boundaries. This way, you will be less likely to lose touch with your personal needs.<sup>5</sup>

### Step 3: Have Treatment Options Ready.

As a part of the planning stage, you’ll need to assemble a list of quick, ready, and accessible treatment options.

If you’re able to say to your loved one, “I’ve done some research and I’ve found these treatment options,” and then present them with a list of readily available resources, they may be more willing to consider treatment. Research viable treatment options online before speaking with

Typical questions for treatment programs include:<sup>6</sup>

- How much does treatment cost?
- Do you accept our [insurance](#)?
- How long is the treatment program?
- Can I visit my loved one while they're in treatment?
- What type of vocational services do you offer?
- Do you offer any specialized programs for [veterans](#), members of the [LGBTQ+](#) community, and family members?
- Do you have an educational program?
- Will I need medication, or do you offer medication?
- What type of counseling is offered in your program?
- Will I be seen by a doctor, therapist, and/or psychiatrist during treatment?

Timing is important when it comes to [speaking with your loved one about their alcohol use](#). Your loved one may waver between feeling that they need help for their alcohol use and feeling that they can handle their alcohol use issues on their own. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) points out that people who need help for an AUD tend to slip through the cracks if treatment isn't immediately available or readily accessible to them. The earlier someone with an addiction gets help, the more effective treatment will be.<sup>7</sup>

### Are You Covered For Treatment?

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## Step 4: Participate in Your Loved One's Treatment.

When your loved one decides to enter treatment, stay involved. The support of loved ones is an important part of the recovery process. You may be asked to participate in couples or family counseling, or you may be asked to make changes in your behaviors, such as not drinking around your loved one or keeping alcohol out of the house.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, with the consent of your loved one, you may be asked to help the treatment center with aspects of their treatment plan, assist with setting goals, or participate together in mutual support group meetings.<sup>8</sup> Avoiding alcoholic relapse often incorporates family support.

recovery.

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## Alcohol Treatment & Recovery from Alcohol Use Disorders

No matter how dire your current situation may seem, know that recovery from an AUD is possible.

[American Addiction Centers](#) can help you and your loved one find the right rehab for your needs. We have treatment facilities across the nation that offer personalized treatment plans and compassionate, understanding staff who know what your loved one is going through. At facilities, you may participate in [inpatient alcohol abuse rehab](#), [outpatient rehab program](#), [12 step treatment](#), and more. If you're interested in learning more about treatment options or if you have any questions or concerns, call our free, confidential helpline to talk to an admissions navigator any time of day or night.

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Justin, Oxford



Apr 19, 2024 [Rehabs.com](#)

I definitely recommend this facility to anyone seeking help for alcohol or drug addiction because if this place can help me like it has, then anyone can get the help they need. Please make the call because this is an amazing incredible place.

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JF, Oxford



Apr 08, 2024 [Rehabs.com](#)

Incredible amazing facility that gave me my life back. Highly recommend to anyone with alcohol or other drug addiction.



Tiff, Oxford



Mar 26, 2024 [Rehabs.com](#)

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## Sources

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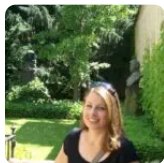
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## About The Contributor



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