

Supporting Someone Addicted to Opioids

If someone you love is addicted to opioids, your support is important for their recovery.

"One of the first steps they can do is just educate themselves how addiction impacts the body and the brain."
Sarah Joyce, Outpatient Program Manager

Once you better understand the impact of addiction, you can help your loved one in their recovery. To figure out exactly how you can help, talk to your loved one and their treatment provider.

"How comfortable are you with coming to me when you're struggling? And if you do come to me, what is it that I can do to help you?" - Sarah Joyce, Outpatient Program Manager

Katie Schneider's family worked together to help her through recovery. She struggled with opioids for several years. Her addiction started with prescription pills and moved to heroin. For a long time, her parents had no idea she was using.

"Once they found out, they obviously were angry, but they said you know we're here to support you, 100 percent. We're going to do this together." - Katie, Patient

"So many people call addiction a family disease and it really is. And that's not blaming the family for the disease. It means that there is such a ripple effect. So many people are impacted." - Dr. Michael Miller, Addiction Medicine Physician

Family and friends need to understand that they might have to take a more distant role to let that person heal. Getting angry or upset can sometimes hurt the recovery process.

"Helping families understand their emotional reactions and their behavioral choices. Helping them understand what enabling is." - Dr. Michael Miller, Addiction Medicine Physician

Enabling protects a person from experiencing the full impact of their behavior – which can be a recovery roadblock. Making excuses for your loved when they make a choice that hurts their recovery or standing by and supporting that type of behavior are examples of enabling.

"Maybe you shouldn't step between an individual's behavior and the natural consequences of those behaviors. You should sort of let them experience their own consequences. Helping family members understand that you got to have some healthy detachment and just kind of let go of this thing and you can't control it. It's bigger than us." - Dr. Michael Miller, Addiction Medicine Physician

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It's a lesson Jake Jansen's family had to learn. Jake's opioid addiction started with pills and ended with heroin, when he could no longer get those medications. He went through several rounds of treatment before finding what worked for him. His family also had to learn how to help Jake in his recovery.

"It was those family members that said you know this is a part of the process and we understand you're getting healthy and if you need us to be by your side during these difficult days, we will be."-Jake, Patient

When a loved one is in recovery, they have to stay away from triggers - the people, places and things that remind them of using opioids.

"I will always be an addict. If I interject those substances back into my body, if I put heroin back into my body, I will be an addict again."-Jake, Patient

As a family member or friend, you can encourage your loved one to avoid triggers and maintain sobriety...something Katie's family never forgets.

"You really need a 100% support system. I don't think I would have been able to do it, if I didn't."-Katie, Patient

If someone you love is starting recovery, there are plenty of resources to help you understand your role in the recovery process. They can be found online, and you can ask your own healthcare provider for advice.