

# When Someone You Love Has a Problem with Alcohol

*It is estimated that more than 76 million people have been exposed to alcoholism in the family, according to The National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information.*

For those who are affected by a loved one's drinking, it can be difficult to know what to do or how to help them. Unfortunately, there are still many stereotypes and untruths associated with alcohol problems which can make it difficult for people to seek help. Too often, alcohol problems are wrongly associated with personal or moral weakness, or lack of willpower. Instead, it can affect anyone regardless of age, gender, income level or lifestyle. People have different reasons, responses and reactions to alcohol, and their own readiness for treatment. While another misconception about alcoholism is that a person must 'hit rock bottom' before they can seek help, it is actually the opposite that is true. As with other types of acute and chronic illness, early recognition and treatment intervention is essential.

You cannot cure a loved one's alcohol problem, but you can support and guide them, which can have a profound effect on their long-term success. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services—Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration:

- Refrain from bribing, preaching, punishing and threatening. Instead, let the person know you care in a calm voice and let them honestly know the factual impact of his/her drinking in daily life. Avoid

emotional appeals that may only increase feelings of guilt and the compulsion to drink or use other drugs.

- Don't cover up or make excuses for the person or shield them from the consequences of their behavior.
- Let the person know that you are learning more about alcohol and other drug use, and attending support groups (i.e. Al-Anon). You may also explain alcohol or drug addiction as an illness to children in the family.
- Don't take over their responsibilities, which can affect their sense of importance or dignity. Establish and maintain a healthy atmosphere in the home, and try to include the person in daily life.
- Encourage new interests and participate in leisure activities that you both enjoy.
- Don't hide or throw away alcohol, or shelter the person from situations where alcohol might be present.
- Discuss the situation with someone you trust.
- Don't try to drink along with the person, or argue with them if they are under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Don't feel guilty or responsible for the person's behavior. Be patient, and take one day at a time.

To access the King County Making Life Easier Program, please call: **888-874-7290** or visit [www.apshelplink.com](http://www.apshelplink.com) (company code: KCMLE)

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