



Alcohol and Drug Use

A Family Concern



Greater Manchester
Mental Health
NHS Foundation Trust

“I’m really pleased now –
feel much more positive now.”

... after referral for Family Interventions



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Why do people use drugs and/or alcohol?



There are many reasons why people take drugs and/or drink alcohol. Some people are naturally curious and want to experiment with different experiences. They may find the initial experiences of drug/alcohol use to be pleasurable, and that can be a key reason why they continue to take drugs. Other people may take drugs or drink alcohol for different reasons.

Some common reasons are:

- To be able to relax
- To feel more confident
- To deal with stress
- To reduce anxious or panicky feelings
- To block out worries or difficult memories
- To ease emotional or physical pain
- Because of depression
- To ease withdrawal symptoms
- Because of being or feeling dependent on it.

Sometimes people use drugs or alcohol to self medicate. In reality alcohol and drug use can often make these issues worse. Although there may be short-term benefits, in the long term drug and alcohol use can actually increase things like anxieties, worries, and stress, and may bring problems arising from the substance itself.

The availability of drugs and drink, and environmental influences, can make it easier for some people to opt into occasional or more frequent patterns of use. But drug/alcohol use is not restricted to people who have problems or live in inner city areas. As the media reports of expulsions from private schools and drug use in rural areas show, illicit drug use is an aspect of our society from top to bottom and in all regions. This is also true of alcohol. Frequent, heavy or harmful drinking can arise in all sectors of our society. ●

Do some people have an addictive personality?

The phrase 'addictive personality' is used so commonly in our culture and media that few of us may question whether an addictive personality type really exists. Yet many doctors and clinicians believe that there is little evidence for an addictive personality as such.

Personality is complex and the role of personality in addiction is uncertain. It is difficult to separate the effects of personality on addiction from the effects of addiction on personality. But modern research studies have shown that there is no single addictive personality.

There may be some personal problems and personality types that are associated with addiction, but that does not mean that everyone with those concerns is going to be using drugs or drinking; and equally there is no personality that is immune from substance use.

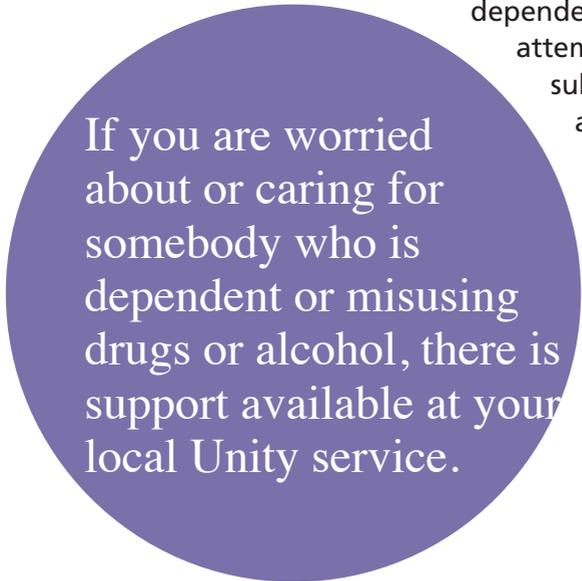
Proneness to alcoholism or drug misuse is better recognised by examining someone's existing drug and alcohol use than by assessing their personality. ●

What do we mean when we say someone has a drug or alcohol problem?

Excessive drinking of alcohol or taking drugs is seen to be a problem when it interferes with a person's life to a significant degree e.g. it causes problems at work, or in relationships, or trouble with the police. Such problems would be classed as alcohol or drug misuse.

People are said to have an alcohol or drug dependence when they show signs of a physical or psychological dependence on the substance. With physical dependence the person may have increased tolerance (need larger amounts of the substance to achieve the same effect) and experience physical withdrawal symptoms when the substance is not used. Signs of a psychological

dependence include: unsuccessful attempts to cut down or control substance use; excessive amounts of time and effort spent in obtaining and using the substance; experiencing cravings or irritability when the substance is not used. ●



If you are worried about or caring for somebody who is dependent or misusing drugs or alcohol, there is support available at your local Unity service.

How does substance misuse affect other family members?

If your relative has a substance misuse problem you will no doubt be familiar with some of the difficulties this causes. It is often difficult to understand why someone may be using drugs or alcohol a lot.

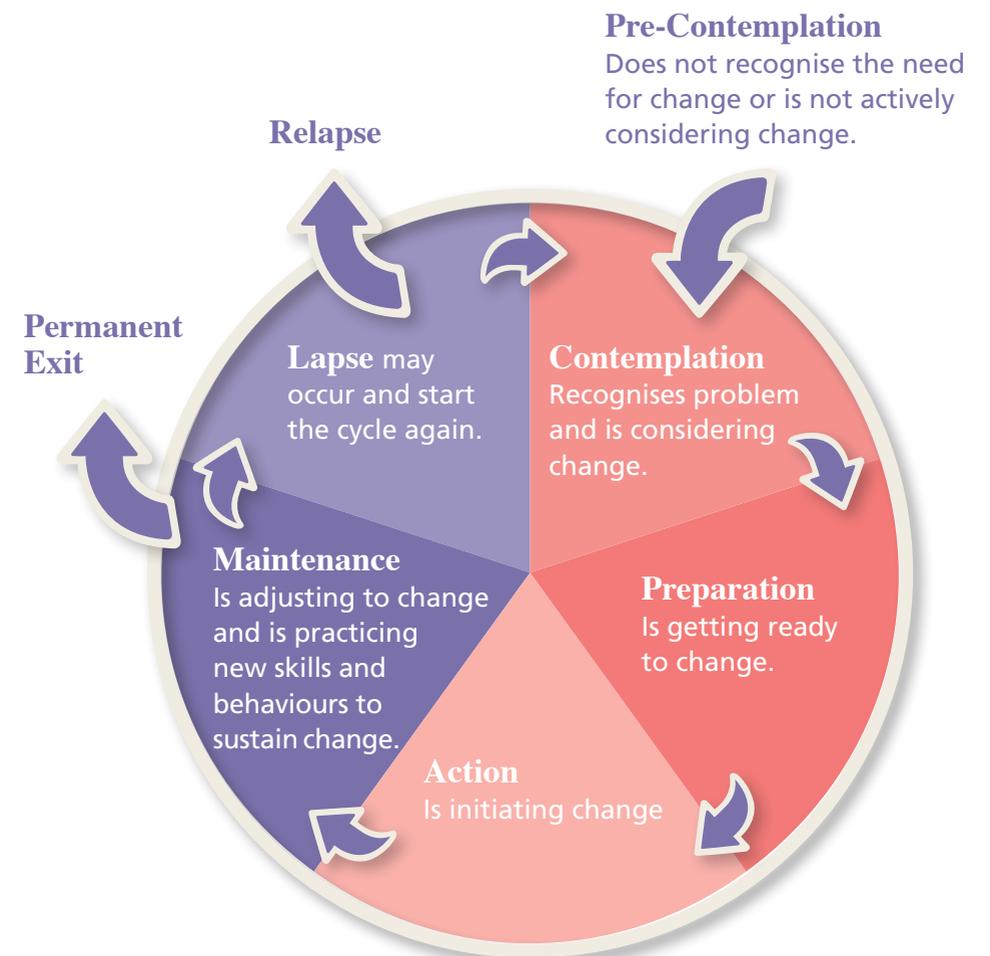
Additionally, there may be problems when the person uses substances within the home. Under these circumstances, tension and arguments are common and relatives can feel helpless about what to do for the best.

When a person is using a lot of drugs or alcohol it can affect their behaviour. Some common difficulties are: being moody or aggressive, stealing or borrowing money, being late or unreliable, neglecting themselves or their home. These behaviours can place a lot of stress on relatives, and lead them to experience problems with their own mental and physical wellbeing (for example: low mood, anxiety, sleep problems, aches and pains). At these times family members may need to seek additional support.

One of the most common concerns is difficulty with the person's lack of awareness or insight into problems their substance use is causing. **You** may be able to see how drugs or alcohol are making their problems worse, but your relative may only think of the benefits they get from substance use. Although it seems natural to want to try and talk the person into changing, this can often make things worse. Arguing with a person that a problem exists can lead to that person taking a more extreme position. ●

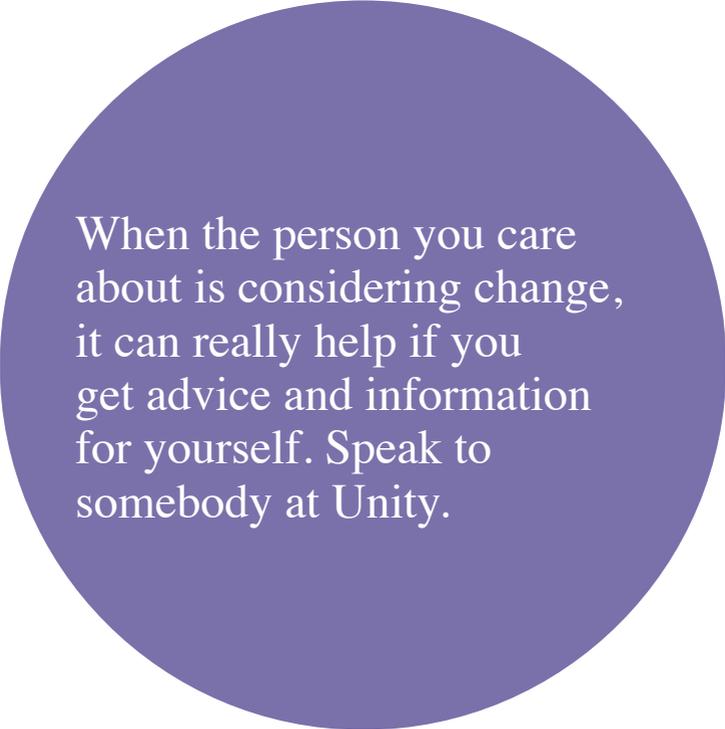
Why are some people in 'denial'?

One model that can be helpful in understanding your relative's attitudes towards their substance use is the 'Cycle of Change' model.



This seems like common sense, and is based on the principal that you cannot change a problem until you recognise there is one. Unless a person accepts the need for change, then active attempts to treat the problems will not be successful. It also takes time to make and maintain changes.

Many people who use drugs and alcohol 'deny' they have a problem. In terms of the cycle of change model these are **not ready for active treatment** as they are not ready for change. They may need help to enhance their motivation. This help would not tell the person what to do, or argue about the rights and wrongs of substance use (we know that confrontation leads to more resistance – a person is more likely to dig their heels in if pressed). Instead the help assists the person to weigh up the pros and cons of their drug/alcohol use, and of change, and they draw their own conclusions. ●



When the person you care about is considering change, it can really help if you get advice and information for yourself. Speak to somebody at Unity.

Why do some people keep lapsing back into drug or alcohol use?

Even when people make some changes to their use of drugs or alcohol, it is very common for them to have a 'lapse', particularly when under stress. This could trigger a full 'relapse' to using the substance regularly again, and the person may go back to a different stage of the change cycle.

It is typical for people to go through all the stages, and then relapse, several times before resolving their problem. There is no 'cure' for alcohol or drug misuse, in the sense that you cannot be sure that the problem has gone forever. We now know that treatment needs to tackle what to do in situations where the person is at increased risk of relapse, or has lapsed.

Think about the last time you tried to change something – such as giving up smoking or trying a new diet – it can take many attempts before you are successful! ●

How can relatives help?

Living with someone who is using drugs or alcohol can raise issues about what is the most helpful way to respond. Sometimes boundaries or limits can be 'pushed' and decisions have to be made about what is or is not acceptable, and how to maintain appropriate boundaries.

Some family members may find this difficult to achieve and might feel pressured into 'giving in' to aspects of their family member's drug/alcohol use. It can be hard to show that you care about a person, but at the same time are not prepared to tolerate substance use and/or adverse impacts of drinking and drug use.

It can be helpful to start by **defining the boundaries**. Take some time to think about what aspects of drug/alcohol use are important to you and other family members. There may be a need to modify these boundaries over time, depending on the behaviour of the family member and impacts of their drug/alcohol use. The advantages of setting boundaries or limits are:

- They invite the drug/alcohol user to be more responsible for their own behaviour;
- They encourage a healthier and more constructive way of relating between people;
- They help families to reduce the impact of substance use on their lives.

When deciding on what the appropriate boundaries might be, it can be helpful to consider:

- What are the negative impacts of substance use that you would like to stop?
- What do you hope to achieve by imposing limits or boundaries?
- Would you accept the behaviour if the person wasn't using drugs/alcohol?

Having defined appropriate boundaries, it can be helpful then to think about **how to set and keep to these boundaries**. Setting clear consequences for boundary breaking can be helpful, but the consequences need to be appropriate and manageable so that you will be able to carry through on them. The consequences need to be something YOU can carry through on, not something the person with the drug and alcohol problem has to do, as you cannot make them do it.

Don't just think about what you will do if the boundary is broken; think also about how you can be encouraging if the person does keep to the boundaries. There is a lot of evidence that shows that people find it easier and more satisfying to stick to boundaries if there is some positive pay-off or reward for doing so. Acknowledgement of achievements and praise are powerful rewards.

Communicating with the substance user about setting appropriate boundaries is ideally undertaken in a process of negotiation, so that the boundaries are agreed by all concerned. Sometimes it can help to have other family members and/or neutral party involved in this process.

You may need to think about:

- Is the boundary appropriate and realistic?
- How will you know if it has been kept to, or broken?
- Do you need to set a deadline or can the boundary be set straight away?
- How will you communicate this boundary setting to the person using drugs/alcohol? Can you anticipate any potential problems in this process?
- How long will the boundaries last for?
- Is there flexibility for changes in circumstances?
- Are there ways in which you can reward the person if they stick within the boundary?
- Where can you get some support to help you to put boundaries in place?
- Is there support you can get with your own feelings in going through this?
- When will you review how well the boundary setting process is working? ●

If a boundary is broken

Sometimes boundaries may be broken just as soon as they have been put into place. Then it is tempting to think that the whole process is 'just a waste of time'.

But having a plan for boundary breaking and sticking to it can be really helpful at this stage. Sometimes drug/alcohol users react to family members efforts to set boundaries by 'pushing against' and hoping that family members will feel unable to enforce a boundary and give in to what the drug/alcohol user wants. ●

It's important to remember the hardest part of boundary setting can be at the beginning, and it's likely things get easier as time goes on, especially if you are consistent.

“It was living hell, you can't tell people how you feel – how do you say “my son's an addict and steals from me”, but I still love him?”

First time a carer had spoken honestly to somebody about their situation



How to respond appropriately and assertively if a boundary is broken

It can be frustrating when a boundary is broken, and it may be tempting to directly express feelings of frustration and annoyance, but reacting with high levels of emotion may not be the best way forward.

An alternative way may be to give yourself a bit of time to clearly and calmly think how to react. An assertive way of handling things can involve calmly stating that the boundary has been broken and how you feel about that. It may feel difficult at first to state what you want and to ask for boundaries to be respected. Appropriate body language can be helpful; so standing upright, making good eye contact, and talking calmly without shouting can be helpful in getting your point across. As with any skill, practice really helps. You might need some 'time out' to calm down before you talk to the person.

TO RE-ESTABLISH THE BOUNDARY, which may involve talking through 'what' and 'why' you need to set some limits. This is an opportunity for learning why the boundary was broken and what might help the person to stick to it in future.

TO CARRY THROUGH EFFECTS OF THE BOUNDARY BEING BROKEN. This means carrying through on the actions you had stated beforehand, being consistent between what you say and what you do.

TO COMMENT ON WHAT HAPPENED AND HOW IT COULD BE DIFFERENT.

For example: *"Every time it happens you say sorry, but then want to carry on as if nothing has happened, until the next time."*

Ask the person to put things right or make amends, and to think about how they can change the pattern. ●

Getting support for yourself

Adjusting to new boundaries and changing patterns of behaviour may be quite a challenge for many substance users. But it can also be challenging and stressful for family members.

One of the things that can really help is talking to other people who understand the difficulty and/or have been in similar situations themselves. Family support, group meetings and services to support families affected by substance use can assist in this process. ●

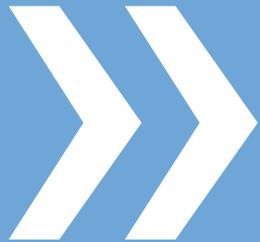


Unity's services have a range of ways to support you – get in touch!

Family interventions

Are you a family member/carer or loved one affected by someone's drug or alcohol use?

Unity can offer you support through our family interventions programme.



Five support sessions on a 1:1 basis that also explore ongoing community support available.

Please ring your local Unity service.

Or call in to speak with a member of the team.

Number and address details are on the back cover of this booklet.



“Thanks, I did not realise there was this kind of support out there.”

... after referral for Family Interventions



Information for carers

GREATER MANCHESTER MENTAL HEALTH NHS FOUNDATION TRUST (GMMH) WEBSITE

Provides carer information and links to training, events and the quarterly carer's newsletter "Who Cares?".

 www.gmmh.nhs.uk/carer-information

CARER DATABASE

GMMH NHS Foundation Trust keeps a carers database and by registering you will receive the quarterly newsletter and information about training sessions and some carer events.

To register contact Neil Grace, Carer Lead

 0161 357 1246 @ neil.grace@gmmh.nhs.uk

CARERS SUPPORT CUMBRIA

This is the consortia of local organisations who can provide support across the county. Organisations include Carlisle Carers, Eden Carers, West Cumbria Carers, South Lakeland Carers and Furness Carers.

 0844 384 3230  www.carerssupportcumbria.co.uk

GRANDPARENTS ASSOCIATION

Provides specialist information covering all the issues that concern grandparents, with a particular focus on those denied contact with their grandchildren, or are kinship carers.

 0845 434 9585 Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm  www.grandparents-association.org.uk

RECOVERY ACADEMY

GMMH's Recovery Academy provides a range of free courses and resources for people with mental health and substance misuse problems, their families and carers, as well as health care professionals; all co-facilitated by people with lived experience.

 0161 772 3782 @ recoveryacademy@gmmh.nhs.uk

THE C.A.R.E. HUB

The 'Compassion and Recovery-focussed Every time' Hub proactively seeks feedback to make a difference to the quality of care GMMH provides.

 0161 703 1362 @ carers@gmmh.nhs.uk

CARERS UK

Provide support to people who need help with looking after a friend or family member. Caring can present all kinds of challenges, from filling in forms to coping with emotions. Carers UK can help with advice, information and support, including online.

Helpline  0808 808 777 @ advice@carersuk.org  www.carersuk.org

CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU (CAB)

There are a number of CABs around Cumbria including Copeland, Carlisle and Eden, Allerdale, Barrow, South Lakes and Penrith. For more information please visit their website.

 www.citizensadvice.org.uk

CUMBRIA ALCOHOL AND DRUG ADVISORY SERVICE (CADAS)

CADAS offer Parent, carer and Family support across the county which includes confidential one to one sessions, support groups, workshops and alternative therapies such as guided visualisation & Black Box.

 01229 811 111 (Barrow)  01228 544140 (Carlisle)

If you think you might be a young carer...

If you are worried about somebody you care for, it can help to speak to a trusted adult like a teacher or youth worker, who can help to get you the support you need.

We are here to help you too. If you think you are a Young Carer and would like our support, please contact Carers Support Cumbria:

 **0844 384 3230**

Online help

<https://babble.carers.org/>

Babble has been created by Carers Trust as an online space where those aged under 18 who are caring for a family member or friend can chat, share their experiences and access information and advice. The site aims to bring together young carers from across the UK in an online space which is safe, fun and supportive.

<http://www.youngcarer.com/>

As part of The Children's Society, the Include Programme reaches out to young carers from all communities through our national and local programmes, helping voluntary and statutory services supporting young carers.

<https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/what-we-do/support-for-young-people/supporting-young-carers/> Online help and support.

<https://matter.carers.org/>

Matter gives young adult carers in the UK a space to connect, share advice and access trusted support.

www.sibs.org.uk Support and advice if you are caring for your siblings.

Difficulties for people who care



We can help.

Local Unity services

Carlisle & Eden

Stocklund House
Castle Street
Carlisle
CA3 8SY
Tel: 01228 212 060

Workington

6 Finkle Street
CA14 2AY
Tel: 01900 270 010

Whitehaven

21b Lowther Street
CA28 7DG
Tel: 01946 350 020

Barrow-in-Furness

92-96 Duke Street
LA14 1RD
Tel: 01229 207 020

Kendal

Whitehorse Yard
39 Stricklandgate
LA9 4LT
Tel: 01539 742 780



The Unity Asset Building Fund supports:

Active Recovery Community • CADAS • CalderWood House • Cumbria Gateway
Forward Together • Growing Well • Jigsaws • Laurie Brewis Trust • The Vulture Club • The Well

