

Checklist: Taking Care of Yourself

Recognizing that your child needs substance abuse treatment can be emotional and overwhelming; and you may feel that the process of finding and getting your child into treatment has taken over your life.

Although you are probably not thinking about yourself right now, one of the smartest things you can do for your child in trouble and your family is to take care of yourself so that you remain strong, healthy and clear headed.

Here are some suggestions for ways to take care of yourself during this difficult time. After considering each step, you may find it rewarding to check off the box as you accomplish it.

Acknowledge what you are going through as a parent

You may be angry, scared, disappointed, ashamed and unsure what to do. All of these feelings are normal. Take a deep breath and recognize that this is a difficult time for you and your family — it is okay to be feeling a wide-range of emotions.

Seek professional counseling for yourself

While your child is battling an alcohol or other drug problem, you're also struggling with serious issues. "The pain, blame, shame, helplessness, and worry that parents feel are huge," Dr. Gayle Dakof, Ph.D. explains. "You need to feel that you are not alone, and I believe parents and caregivers need professional help to help them address feelings of blame and shame."

Ask your health insurance company for a referral to approved therapists, counselors, psychologists and psychiatrists. You can also try the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Mental Health Locator <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/databases/>

Your employer's employee assistance program (EAP), a confidential resource used and trusted by millions of people each year that helps employees and their family identify and resolve personal concerns. EAPs have a lot of experience in identifying substance use problems and finding ways to treat them. Ask your human resources department at work about EAP.

Many human service agencies provide help, including counseling and guidance centers, and mental health clinics.

- Your physician may be able to provide a referral for a professional counselor.
- You can also visit a state-by-state list at the American Public Human Service Agency <http://www.aphsa.org/Links/links-state.asp> for counselors.

Find a Support Group

Not all support groups are well-run or a good fit for you personally. You may have to shop around until you find a therapist or support group that is the best fit for you and your family.

- Al-Anon <http://www.al-anon.alateen.org/english.html> is a free Twelve-Step program providing support and guidance to help family and friends of people with alcohol problems recover from the effects of living with a problem drinker — whether the person is still drinking or not. Meetings are readily available in most communities across the country. To find an Al-Anon program, call 1-888-4AL-ANON or visit: <http://www.alanon.alateen.org/meetings/meeting.html>
- Nar-Anon http://www.nar-anon.org/Nar-Anon/Nar-Anon_Home.html is a free Twelve-Step program providing support and guidance to help family members and friends of drug users. Meetings are available in communities across the country. To find a Nar-Anon group, call 1-800-477-6291 or visit http://www.nar-anon.org/Nar-Anon/Nar-Anon_Groups.html.
- Look for other local support groups that can be found through a basic web search (such as meetup.com, groups.yahoo.com) or the phone book.

Reach Out To Others — In Your Local Community

- Think about family, friends, neighbors, colleagues and others in your community who have experiences raising a child with an alcohol or other drug problem.
- Make a list of people to reach out to who you think could lend an ear and offer support.
- Make an effort to meet up with each person one-on-one so you can share your fears, anger, and concerns with someone who understands and who has been there.

Reach Out To Others – Online

Connect with other parents who understand what you're going through. Visit the [online communities](#) available at The Partnership at Drugfree.org to gain wisdom, find comfort and feel less alone.

- [Helping Hand](#) is safe, non-judgmental place for parents to ask questions — and get answers from experts and parents who have been there.
- [Read stories](#) of what others have been through — the emotions, the sacrifices and the challenges they have faced. Feel free to share your story too.
- Read these parents' journals where they chronicle the ups and downs of life with an addicted child.
- Read brief — and inspiring — Words of Hope from other parents.
- Visit our Intervene blog, our community of parents concerned about their child's alcohol and drug use: www.drugfree.org/intervene

Do Things That Makes You Feel Better

- Whether it's taking long walks, exercising, or having coffee with a friend, take time out for yourself to do the things you enjoy. Scheduling even a little bit of daily or weekly "me-time" can be healthy and ultimately help you be more focused on helping your child.
- Some parents find it helpful to write a letter to their child. The simple act of putting words onto paper can be cathartic — allowing you to express your feelings to your child in a way you might be able to in person.
<http://intervene.drugfree.org/2010/04/writing-a-letter-to-your-child-with-a-drug-or-alcohol-problem/>