

# Supporting Someone with a Substance Use Disorder

## Substance Use

When someone uses substances – like alcohol or drugs – it can cause them to have health issues. It can also cause them to have problems at work, school, or home. Even though they may want to stop, it is difficult. Why? Substances change the way our brain works.

Fortunately, substance use disorders are common medical conditions that people can and do recover from.



## Your Rights

Pregnant people who use substances have the right to be treated with dignity and respect.

It is important that those helping you:

- **Use kind and respectful language**

It is unkind to call someone an “addict” or “junkie.” These words label a person based on only one activity they do in life. A person with substance use disorder is a whole person with many different interests, hobbies, and gifts. Use words that are kind and help them see their full value.

- **Leave your judgment at the door**

Substance use disorder is a health issue that impacts many people. It can happen to anyone. People with substance use disorder benefit from those who are non-judgmental and support them based on their needs.

- **Stay positive**

Encourage your loved one to get the care they need, but try to not focus too much on detox and rehab. Call or visit your local clinic to get a list of services available for people with substance use disorder. Ask your loved one if they would like you to come with them to any appointments.

**Kind and respectful language includes using what is called person-first language. For example, saying “people who use drugs,” instead of saying “drug users.”**



- **Focus on safety**

Keep in mind some people are not ready to stop taking substances. Helping someone develop strategies to protect their safety and reduce their baby’s risk while they continue to take substances may be where they are at now.



- **Encourage connection**

The opposite of addiction is connection. Our cultural teachings have helped us understand how to live well for generations. Encouraging your loved one to participate in traditional practices and ceremonies can be healing.

- **Recognize that relapse is not a sign of failure**

For many people, relapse is a part of the recovery process. It's normal for someone to struggle as they work toward recovery. Judgment and unkindness only stand in their way. However, love and support can open doors.

## Caregiver Self-Care

Supporting someone with a substance use disorder can be hard at times. It's important to care for yourself, so you can stay positive and hopeful.

**Talk with a counselor** so you can feel supported and heard.

**Relieve stress** by participating in activities that calm your body, mind, and spirit. Activities like meditating, journaling, praying, singing, spending time in nature, dancing, or cooking can help you feel relaxed and grounded.

**Work on a traditional craft**, like weaving, carving, or basketmaking. Doing so teaches many lessons, including patience and practice keeping a good mindset. Also, working with traditional materials connects us to our roots and can help us turn inward to be able to “hear” our own thoughts.

**Take care of your physical self** by getting enough sleep and eating foods that will support you in feeling good. Doing this can help you stay strong for you and your loved ones.

**Be supportive but have realistic expectations** for your loved one. Don't expect them to quickly get help and get better. Healing from substance use takes time. It's important to stay by their side and go their pace.

**Remember that no one can “make” someone else change** their behaviors without their consent. If they choose to, your loved one must learn to manage their medical condition. We are all in the process of learning different life skills to be happier and healthier. As you and loved one's journey continues, you will better understand how to take care of them and yourself.



Visit the Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board's website at [www.npaihb.org/SUD](http://www.npaihb.org/SUD) to learn more about substance use, getting help, and other important topics.