

*What You Need To Know About...*

# When Someone You Care About Is Struggling With Addiction

One of the most frequent things we hear from people who have someone in their family or a friend who is struggling with addiction is, “How do I help this person?” Or... “How do I get them to stop?” We’ll start with some things to understand first, and then talk about what you can do to help yourself and the person you care about.

## **What is Addiction?**

This is a tough thing to talk about because there are so many perspectives about addiction. It can really get confusing. Our view is that if a person continues with the activity even though it causes problems in any area of life, it could be considered addiction, and we help people with that.

Areas of life might be:

- Physical Health
- Family Relationships or Functioning
- Career/Job/School
- Social Activities/Fun/Play
- Intimate Relationship
- Financial Health
- Friend Relationships

Addictions might be:

- Alcohol
- Opioids/Painkillers
- Cocaine
- Gambling
- Eating
- Internet
- Cigarettes
- Heroin/Narcotics
- Marijuana
- Some sexual behaviors
- Video gaming
- Meth/Methamphetamine

## **WHAT CAN YOU DO?**

**There are at least these three important things to do when you are in this type of situation:**

### **Coping and Self Care Activities**

Taking good care of yourself is one of the three most important things you can do when you have someone close to you dealing with addiction. It is very stressful so it is important to pace yourself (know your limits), and also make sure that you are doing things you enjoy as often as you can and as often as it’s reasonable. Keep things in a balanced place in life as much as you are able – you need time to build your energy up because living with addiction is a big drain on your energy level.

At the link below, we have several self-help resources. Near the top of that page is a link to a self-care handout that we use with clients and this has many different activities people do for self-care. Please take a look and hopefully at least a few of these ideas or resources will appeal to you.

<https://www.lifepathscounseling.com/self-help-resources/>

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*6901 S. Pierce St., Suite 350, Littleton CO 80128  
303-801-7878*

*<https://www.lifepathscounseling.com>  
[info@lifepathscounseling.com](mailto:info@lifepathscounseling.com)*

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## **Boundaries and Control**

Being close to someone with a destructive addiction often brings painful situations and experiences into your life, as well as the person dealing with the addiction. It causes a lot of angst when bad things happen because of things outside of your control. Having strong boundaries is as important as taking good care of yourself. Keep it clear for yourself on what are appropriate boundaries with consequences, and when your “limits” become controlling behavior.

A good idea to guide you is to remember that when you are controlling you are trying to alter someone else’s behavior and it becomes *about them*. When you have boundaries, they are intended to protect you and help you get your needs met and so, boundaries are *about you*.

Here are some examples of boundary setting versus controlling behavior:

### Boundaries

“No, that isn’t okay with me”  
It is assertive  
Defines how I will be treated  
Based in caring for yourself and the other  
You always know the other has a choice  
Asking for what I need

### Control

“You have to stop that”  
It is manipulative  
Coercion, attempting to force a change  
Based in fear and insecurity  
You are trying to make them change  
Can become a debate about who is right/wrong

Codependency and enabling are terms often used to refer to the behavior of someone in your situation. Some of the resources and context around these terms is helpful – and sometimes it can feel shaming as if you are being blamed for “allowing” the addictive behavior to continue in your loved one. If you can use resources about codependency and enabling to strengthen your own boundaries and sense of empowerment, that is great! Take care not to let it influence you to feel responsible for the addict’s behavior. *That person’s behavior and choices are not because of something you have done or didn’t do.*

## **Offer Help – If It Is Wanted**

The third thing you can do to help someone who is struggling with addiction is to express your concern for that person and offer information you have found *if they are willing to receive it*. It’s important that boundaries are respected in both directions. You can’t make a person deal with an addiction, that person must choose.

In the medical and mental health fields, we continue to learn more about addiction and in particular, about the effect addiction has on a person’s brain. Addiction can override a person’s rational thought and many of us have seen this happen right in front of our eyes. It is important to remember that sometimes an addiction becomes bigger than willpower, love, or the desire to change.

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## Options in Treatment and Recovery

Self-help and doing it on your own – Using resources such as self-help books or other media, or plain old will power is one way that people get into recovery and many can be successful at it. Some self-help books are listed below in the resources section.

Support groups – The most well-known addiction support group is “AA” or a “12 step program” such as Alcoholics Anonymous. The 12 steps in these programs guide support groups when they meet and provide a framework to work towards recovery. Most of the time there is a religious component.

There are other support groups or “formats” for support such as:

- \* SMART Recovery
- \* Celebrate Recovery
- \* Moderation Management
- \* Secular Organizations for Sobriety (SOS)
- \* Women for Sobriety
- \* LifeRing Secular Recovery

Note that at least 12 step programs and SMART Recovery both have resources for family and friends of someone who is dealing with addiction. In the various 12 step programs, there are support group meetings that you will find as “Al-Anon,” (alcohol) “Nar-Anon,” (narcotics) etc. based on the type of addiction. SMART Recovery has resources on their website (<https://www.smartrecovery.org>) under “Start Here” and then click “Family and Friends.”

Outpatient counseling – This is the type of support we provide here at LifePaths and is typically weekly appointments with a counselor trained in addictions and supporting someone through recovery. It may be more or less frequent appointments based on where a person is in the recovery process, or other life circumstances.

Intensive outpatient program (IOP) – Several locations around the Denver metro area offer IOPs, which are often a couple of weeks and several hours each of the weekdays during those weeks. People can participate in individual counseling, group counseling, support groups and other activities to support recovery after the program ended.

Inpatient/rehabilitation/recovery facilities – These are longer term treatment centers of various lengths of time and usually people who attend these programs are there during the day and nights for the length of the program, sometimes with outings approved by staff to spend time with family away from the facility for a few hours at a time when a person is near the end of their program.

We encourage you to thoroughly understand any type of treatment support you are considering; get a referral from someone you trust; and speak with professionals about treatment approach, requirements, insurance coverage, credibility, and other concerns. For instance, a program called Narconon has some Colorado locations and appears to be similar to other addiction treatment facilities, however it is actually a Church of Scientology organization and their treatment approach follows principles of their church. You want to be certain that the approach will be a good fit.

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## Resources

<https://www.smartrecovery.org>

The Mind-Body Workbook for Addiction, by Stanley H. Block, PhD., Carolyn Bryant Block, and Guy DuPlessis, MA

Phoenix Multisport – This is a local gym that is free for people in recovery. A variety of classes and equipment AND a supportive community as well. They are in the downtown Denver area.

<http://thephoenix.org>.

<https://www.alanon.org>

<http://www.hazeldenbettyford.org/locations/childrens-program-aurora> - Children's Program at Betty Ford Center (children ages 7-12)

There are a few more resources on addiction at the following link, as well as resources on many other topics as well.

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**THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING OUR WORKSHOP-WE HOPE IT HAS BEEN HELPFUL!**

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