

Caring for someone who uses drugs and/or alcohol

Life in Recovery

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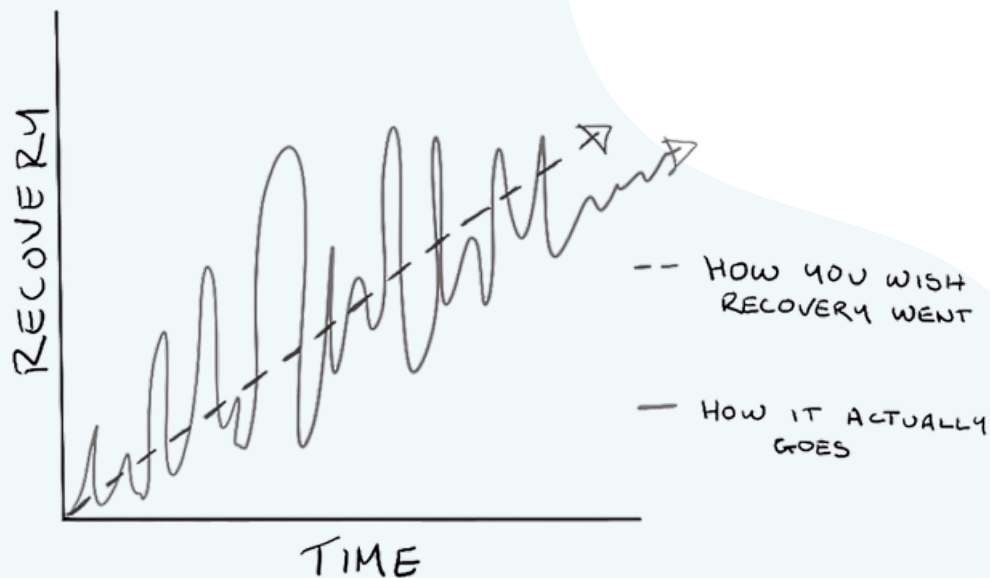
Life in Recovery

When you are supporting someone with a drug and/or alcohol problem, often the main focus is to help the person recover. This booklet will help explain what recovery actually means, what to expect, and how to support your loved one and yourself through this transition.

What is recovery?

Recovery looks different for everyone. Often when we imagine recovery we imagine the person completely abstaining from drugs and/or alcohol, and returning back to their life before they started using.

However, recovery is often about moving forward rather than going back to how life used to be. It is about creating a healthy and safe life focusing on the future. Recovery can include abstinence from drug/alcohol use, but could also be about moderating and reducing their use. It is about a person gaining back control of their life.



Recovery is not a choice a person makes once, but is a choice they make every day. Recovery will have its ups and downs but it is all part of making progress.

Sometimes people will lapse (a one-off occurrence) or relapse (going back to drinking/drug use over a prolonged period of time). It can be difficult seeing someone (re)lapse, but this can be a part of someone's recovery and offer an important learning experience.

Recovery capital

Recovery Capital is a term used to describe the resources that people can draw upon to move into, and sustain, recovery. These can be physical resources (housing, finances etc.) but also social resources (peer support, recovery community, family/friends), and resources related to attitudes, beliefs, values, health etc. This Recovery Capital is just as important for Concerned Others as it is for the person using substances, and Carers Leeds can support you to develop these resources.

Recovery for everyone

Recovery is not just for the person using but for the Concerned Other too. Supporting someone who uses drugs and/or alcohol has a massive impact on your life and it is essential you think about what you want and about what recovery looks like for you e.g. seeing your friends and family again, going back to work, being able to put yourself first.

Looking after yourself when someone else is in recovery is important. It is a major life change for everyone. When someone is using drugs/alcohol often the dynamics of your relationship change, and when they are in recovery you can feel a loss of being a carer. Knowing when to step back and when the person is ready for more responsibility can be difficult. Speaking to people in similar situations can help with this adjustment, such as at the Carers Leeds Support Groups, or Al-Anon and Fam-Anon meetings.

Realities of recovery

It is important to remember that a person who is in recovery may still struggle with tasks not relating to their substance use. The challenges of day-to-day life could be huge and tasks that other people take for granted could seem overwhelming for someone with a long history of addiction.

Sometimes people can feel disappointed by a person's recovery because it does not happen how they expect, it is important to keep an open mind and to focus on the positives and the progress made. People can become jaded when recovery does not work as they expected or if they have multiple lapses or relapses, but the most important thing you can do as a Concerned Other is remain hopeful.

5 tips on supporting someone in recovery

- 1. Have open and honest conversations.** Try to talk about what situations are difficult for the person using substances. Are there certain places, dates, people that make them more likely to use? Could you offer support around these 'triggers'?
- 2. Recovery is more than just not using substances.** Recovery is about all of someone's needs being met to support them move on with life. Are they in safe and secure accommodation? Do they have support for their mental and physical health? Do they have peer support? It is more than just not using / drinking.
- 3. A lapse / relapse does not mean that we are back to square one.** Lapses and relapses are not uncommon in someone's recovery journey and can be important experiences to learn from. What is important is how someone responds to a (re)lapse and the support they put in place to avoid it happening again.

4. Support is out there. As family/friends, we are sometimes not the best people to support someone in their early recovery. However, services such as Forward Leeds and peer support meetings (such as AA, NA and SMART) offer support from experts and people with lived experience of addiction that are there to offer support and guidance. These support networks are vital in early recovery.

5. Sometimes people aren't ready for recovery. Recovery is a difficult choice for a person to make, and is often frustrating for loved ones to see someone not ready to recover. For recovery to work, the person using drugs and/or alcohol must be ready to commit to working on all aspects of their life. Sometimes people need more time to get to a point where they are ready to make changes.

Please take a look at our website for further information on caring for someone who uses drugs and/or alcohol.
carersleeds.org.uk/concernedothers

