

# Caring for someone who uses drugs and/or alcohol

## Rescuing

**Website**

**[carersleeds.org.uk](https://carersleeds.org.uk)**

**Email**

**[support@carersleeds.org.uk](mailto:support@carersleeds.org.uk)**

**Facebook**

**Carers Leeds**

**Instagram**

**@carersleeds**



**Support Line  
0113 380 4300**

# What is 'Rescuing'?

Addiction can bring with it a number of difficult and frightening experiences for the Concerned Other (family, friends, parents, husband, wife, siblings etc.).

It is human nature to want to support the person you care for, to ensure they are not in pain or distress and to want to help them stop using drugs or alcohol.

People using drugs and/or alcohol can often be protected, or 'Rescued', from the full impact of their substance use by Concerned Others. What started out as well meaning support can lead to the person using drugs or alcohol being protected from the natural consequences of their addiction.

## Examples of rescuing behaviour:

- Making excuses (calling their drugs/alcohol worker to say they will not be attending when they are not interested in going to the appointment / have been using drugs/alcohol)
- Trying to take control of their drug or alcohol use
- Driving them to appointments when they have no money for travel
- Giving them money
- Buying the drugs or alcohol for them
- Paying their debts
- Doing their washing, shopping and house work
- Delivering food / drugs / alcohol to their home

# What happens when we rescue?

Rescuing someone can be unhelpful as it does not resolve the stress for the Concerned Other and may make it worse.

When we rescue the person using drugs or alcohol we can prevent them from experiencing the full, negative consequences of their substance use.

When we do this, we discourage them from learning and coping with their mistakes, and deny them the opportunities to realise the full extent of the problems relating to their drug or alcohol.

## The end result for the Concerned Other can be:

- Feeling angry, resentful and powerless to do anything about the addiction.
- Finding that their lives have become unmanageable as they have become so focused on trying to manage or change the person using drugs or alcohol.
- Thinking they must look after and care for the person using drugs or alcohol, even when the cost to them and other family members is high.
- Experiencing depression, anxiety and mental or physical health problems as a result of their worrying about the person using drugs or alcohol.
- Finding it very difficult to set and enforce boundaries.

If someone is rescued from the full extent of the 'costs' of their drug or alcohol use, they are not making an accurate, informed decision.

Experiencing the negative side of drug or alcohol use can sometimes promote a change in thinking for the person using and lead to changes in their substance use.

## **What's Wrong With Rescuing?**

Rescuing can send an unhelpful message to the person who is using drugs or alcohol.

**From the drug/alcohol user's point of view, the result can be:**

- They come to expect to be looked after
- They are prevented from living a normal life, e.g. a life where they make decisions, experience personal success and failure and learn to pick themselves up and carry on
- They do not get to find out how resourceful and resilient they can be
- They are prevented from developing a sense of self-awareness and self worth
- They may become dependent on the Concerned Other and feel they cannot (even when they may want to and can) do things on their own and for themselves

**A person using drugs/alcohol is not necessarily incapable of doing things for themselves. They may choose not to do certain things we would rather they did, but that does not mean they are not capable.**

## **What about you?**

**Leaving a person you care for to face up to, and experience, the problems of their drug or alcohol use can feel frightening and can be a difficult thought for Concerned Others.**

**Support is available to talk about these worries and to make decisions about the best ways to support the person using drugs or alcohol.**

**By accessing 1-1 support and groups you can begin to plan how to reduce and stop the rescuing behaviours whilst offering other forms of support which can promote changes for the drug or alcohol user.**

**We can also support you to set effective boundaries and look at different coping strategies.**