

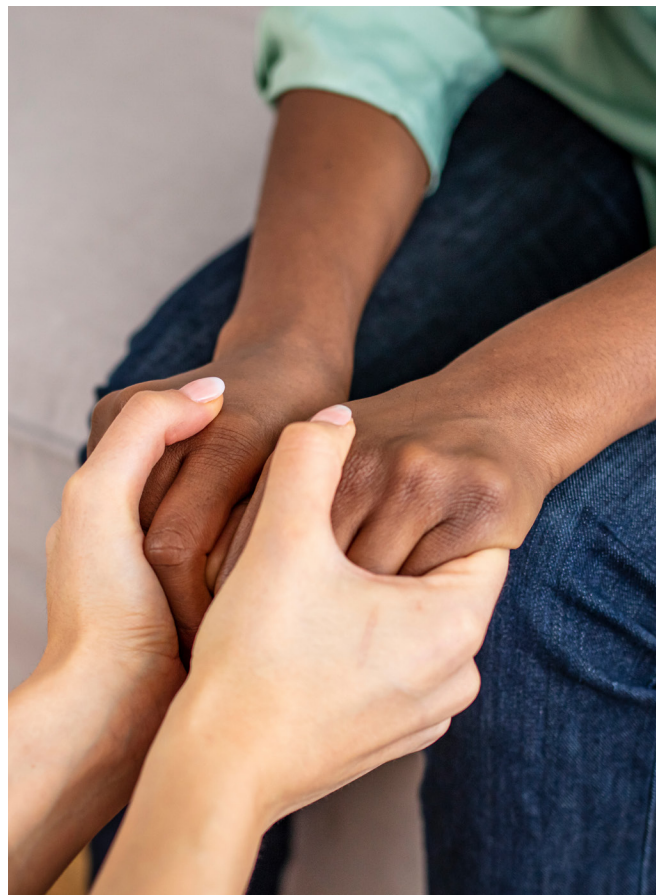
Seeking Treatment for a Substance Use Disorder: A Guide for Families

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Substance use disorder (SUD) affects about 23 million Americans each year. Yet only about 10% of those who need treatment get it. Experts refer to this as the “treatment gap.” It is important to note that not all people with SUDs will need treatment in order to recover. In fact, the majority of people with SUDs will recover naturally and without formal treatment. Nevertheless, many people with severe SUDs will need treatment. Fortunately, family members and concerned others can play an important role in bridging the gap and helping their loved ones into treatment. (Recognizing that family systems are diverse, the term “family members” is used throughout to refer to include “loved ones” and “concerned others.”) When family members are involved and supportive, individuals may be twice as likely to enter treatment than those without family support. Families may offer hope and encouragement, emotional support, or even more tangible forms of support such as a ride to treatment.

If you have decided you want to help your loved one access SUD treatment, but you do not know where to start, you are not alone. Navigating addiction treatment is challenging because there are so many different factors to consider at a time when family members are already overstressed. The process is often overwhelming. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to addiction treatment. People with SUDs have unique strengths and face unique barriers. Regardless of your situation, it is important to find treatment that best suits your needs.



The purpose of this guide is to simplify that process and to help family members consider some important aspects of addiction treatment. It includes information about different types of treatment, what makes for effective treatment, as well as some other factors to consider.

Types of Treatment

Detoxification: Many people confuse detoxification with treatment or recovery from SUD. Detoxification or “detox” for short, refers to a set

of interventions to manage withdrawal symptoms. Because fears of withdrawal symptoms can keep people from accessing treatment, many inpatient and outpatient treatment centers include detoxification services. Although detoxification is often viewed as “getting drugs out of your system,” it should not be seen as a long-term treatment for SUD. Instead, detoxification may be an important tool to achieve an initial period of abstinence. However, in many cases, treatment will still be needed.

Outpatient Therapy: Therapy is a sensible place to begin the process of addiction treatment for your loved one. You might not have an addiction treatment center in your community. But you probably have a behavioral health organization that provides mental health services. Therapists are trained to perform SUD assessments. An assessment is a helpful first step. It will figure out whether your loved one has an SUD, whether detoxification is necessary, the severity of their addiction, and the most appropriate form of treatment. Therapists

are well-informed about SUD treatment resources. Using an assessment, they can connect you with the appropriate provider. Also, you can go through counseling individually, as a couple, or as a family. Research shows all three forms of therapy can help a person with a SUD.

Intensive Outpatient Therapy (IOP): IOP is similar to outpatient therapy in that patients can continue to live at home during treatment. However, unlike regular outpatient counseling, IOP is a significantly more intensive form of treatment. Whereas individuals might meet with an outpatient therapist on a weekly or even monthly basis, individuals in IOP dedicate approximately four hours per day, four to five days per week to treatment. IOP offers a more structured environment that typically combines individual therapy with group therapy sessions. Patients benefit not only from the individualized attention to their mental health needs but also from the support they experience in a group setting. IOP is often used as



an effective treatment by itself or as a steppingstone to ease a person's transition from residential treatment back into their community.

Inpatient/Residential Treatment: Residential treatment centers are considered to be the most intensive form of SUD treatment. They are most right for people with severe SUDs or those who have been unsuccessful in outpatient treatment settings. Though they vary in many ways, residential treatment centers typically include some of the same components including structured schedules, individual therapy, group therapy, and mutual aid meetings (i.e., Alcoholics Anonymous, SMART recovery, etc.). Residential treatment centers offer numerous benefits beyond what outpatient services can provide. Most importantly, they provide drug- and alcohol-free environments for people to begin their recovery. Residential treatment centers vary in length of time and may range from as short as two weeks to as long as one year.

Medications for SUD: In addition to the behavioral treatment approaches described above, there are also FDA-approved medications to treat some types of SUD. For instance, Anabuse is a medication that, when mixed with alcohol, makes a person feel nauseous. It can be an effective strategy to reduce alcohol cravings. Similarly, there are three medications approved for the treatment of opioid use disorder: Buprenorphine, Methadone, and Naltrexone. These, too, are evidence-based treatments to reduce cravings for opioids.

Principles of Effective Treatment

Each of the treatment approaches described above is an evidence-based approach. However, not all treatment providers offer equally good quality care. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) has published a list of the 13 principles of effective treatment. They have been condensed here into the most important principles to consider.

No single treatment is right for everyone. It is important to reiterate that everyone has unique needs

that must be addressed as a part of their treatment.

Treatment must be immediately available. As family members know, the window of opportunity to get a loved one into treatment can be quite small. At exactly the moment that a person expresses willingness for treatment, it is critical that it be available.

Effective treatment attends to multiple needs of the individual. SUD is most often related to either trauma or a co-occurring mental illness. Individuals may also be suffering a variety of health consequences from substance use such as HIV or Hepatitis C. Effective treatment will address holistic needs at the same time as it addresses substance use.

Treatment does not need to be voluntary to be effective. Just because your loved one does not appear motivated for treatment does not mean it won't work. Research shows that people who are involuntarily committed into treatment have roughly the same success as those who choose treatment on their own.

Recovery from SUD is a long-term process. Recovery is a process that may require multiple episodes of treatment, remission, and relapse. Effective treatment programs do not simply end when a person leaves treatment. They offer aftercare support and/or connect individuals to the resources that will support their recovery at home.

Additional Factors to Consider

Dual Diagnosis: Nearly half of people with SUDs also have a co-occurring mental disorder (i.e., anxiety, depression, etc.). If your loved one has co-occurring conditions, it is important that they access care for their SUD and other mental disorders at the same time. Specialized treatment centers called dual diagnosis centers are designed to address both mental health and substance use problems.

Secular vs. Religious: Some treatment programs use religion and spirituality as a form of recovery support while others do not. Your loved one may be more likely to recover if they access a kind of treatment that aligns with their beliefs and values.

Short-term vs. Long-term: There is no clear sign of how long a person with an SUD should remain in treatment, if at all. But research shows that longer stays are more effective. In general, the longer that a person stays in treatment, the greater the likelihood that they will sustain recovery.

Insurance Coverage/Cost: Addiction treatment can be expensive, and some treatment providers will only accept certain forms of insurance. This may present a barrier to families accessing treatment. Fortunately, there are state-funded programs that accept Medicaid and others that use a sliding scale.

If you or your loved one needs SUD treatment, visit the Kentucky state treatment locator at <https://findhelpnowky.org/ky> or the national treatment locator at <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help>. This interactive dashboard will allow you to search for treatment and to filter by length of stay, insurance coverage and cost, and to navigate to dual diagnosis programs.

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