



COPING WITH SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN YOUR FAMILY?

COMMON FEELINGS

Think about how you feel about the person abusing substances and the effects of the substances. Try to focus on the emotions that relate specifically to these issues. Here are some of the feelings some say they feel:

Guilt **Shame** **Sadness** **Anger and betrayal** **Depression** **Stress**

Guilt - A common reaction, although based on misunderstanding, is guilt. As you wonder how such problems developed in your family, you may worry about things you did or said in the past. Especially if you are the parent of the substance abuser, you may wonder if mistakes you made as a parent may have led to the substance abuse.

Try to remember, *nothing you may have said, done, not said, or not done can cause substance abuse. Substance abuse is a disease which affects the actions and choices of the substance abuser.*

Shame – Another common reaction, although also unnecessary, is to feel ashamed and embarrassed about the problems in your family. You may even find yourself avoiding friends, because you don't want them to know about this struggle. Be aware that you are not alone with this problem. Substance abuse is the nation's #1 health problem, and it affects millions of families. There are families struggling with substance abuse in virtually every church, school, community group and neighborhood in the nation.

Sadness – If you feel a deep sense of sadness, it's no wonder. You've watched someone you care about destroying his or her own life. You may be caring for a child you love, whose own young life has been affected painfully. And you may have taken on huge new responsibilities, perhaps losing freedom, friendships and favorite activities. Your sadness is natural, so look for ways to find comfort. A support group can be an important source of understanding and encouragement.

Anger and betrayal – Anger is another completely natural response. Your life is intertwined with a substance abuser, and substance abusers may say or do cruel things, lie, break promises, and even threaten violence. You may also find that the child in your care acts out in ways that can be infuriating, saying mean things, breaking family rules, and worse. Your anger is natural, but it helps to direct it carefully. Try to focus on the true cause of family problems: its substance abuse that's causing all these problem behaviors. Even a child's negative behaviors may be caused by the long-term effects of the parent's addiction. That doesn't excuse the behaviors, or mean you have to put up with them - but it is, at least, a comfort to realize that it's not meanness personally directed at you. As with sadness, a good immediate help with anger may be to turn to a support group, trusted friends, or some of each. It's especially important not to vent your angry feelings about the parent to the child, or about the child to the parent. Look instead for a person or setting that you can trust as caring, confidential, and not personally involved.

Depression - Do you feel blue, down much of the time? Do you have trouble enjoying activities that used to give you pleasure and joy? Do you feel irritable or easily upset by things that you used to take in stride? Are you having trouble sleeping? Have your eating patterns changed significantly? You may be experiencing depression. Sometimes even a support group isn't enough to keep these feelings in check. If you are experiencing the symptoms of depression described above, perhaps it's time to seek out a counselor who can help.

Stress - If you are like most caregivers, you give—and give—and give—to your family, and you only think about yourself later (if at all). With so many things to do, you may feel stressed and anxious or worried a lot.

You are not alone—caregiving is a stressful job.

Although it's normal to have these feelings, you don't have to live with stress or anxiety that's so severe it interferes with your sleep, work, or enjoyment of life. See: <http://www.lakecountyil.gov/Health/Documents/SupportGroups.pdf> and <http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>

Source: SAMSHA, the National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare and National Association for Children of Alcoholics