

away once the alcoholic stops drinking. But the alcoholic is probably not responsible for all your problems. Whether or not the alcoholic seeks help, you owe it to yourself to begin seeking solutions. It's important to do what you can to improve your own life.

Even if both you and your partner do get help, alcoholism still can destroy relationships. If this happens, remember that your life is not over. Don't blame yourself for the breakup.

#### **Encourage any interest in treatment.**

Take the alcoholic's intentions seriously, but don't push, even if the drinker is slow to act. Like any adult, the alcoholic needs the freedom to choose. Look into treatment options and costs together and express your belief that treatment will work. If the drinker is a mother of dependent children, you can help her plan for child care during treatment.

#### **Consider family intervention.**

In intervention, family and close friends come together to review lovingly but firmly the alcoholic's drinking. They describe to the alcoholic how the disease has affected each of them.

By breaking through the alcoholic's denial and stopping the behaviors in close relationships that perpetuate drinking, intervention may help the drinker decide to seek treatment. Because intervention is a complicated and sensitive process, friends and family members should not try it on their own. Contact your local NCADD Affiliate or treatment center for referral to trained intervention specialists.

#### **Let the experts take over.**

You may feel that the alcoholic's regard for you—or for your children—should have been enough incentive to stop drinking. You may feel left out when outsiders replace you as a source of help; you may feel jealous. Consider that if the disease were diabetes, you wouldn't be the sick person's only support or means of recovery and you wouldn't feel jealous of the doctor. Alcoholics who recover for their own sakes have the best chance of staying sober.

#### **Be patient with the recovery process.**

As with all illnesses, the alcoholic needs time to recover and regain health. There may be relapses, breaks in treatment or periods when the alcoholic behaves drunkenly even when sober. Old tensions and resentments will flare up occasionally. Accept these as part of the illness and concentrate on your own recovery.

#### **Respect the recovering alcoholic's choices for avoiding alcohol.**

Some recovering alcoholics may feel at ease around people who are drinking, while others avoid these situations. During the initial months of recovery, many alcoholics keep alcohol out of their homes. In time, most alcoholics become comfortable when alcohol is served in social settings and they develop ways of graciously refusing alcohol. Similarly, some alcoholics speak freely about their past drinking, others do so only with trusted friends and loved ones. There's no right or wrong.

#### **Encourage new interests and activities.**

Many people who join Alcoholics Anonymous spend a lot of time with the friends they've made there. If you have an open invitation, feel free to participate in your partner's new activities. Continue with your own self-help program and develop or renew interests of your own, too. Above all, find ways to enjoy life together, ways that don't rely on alcohol.

#### **Focus on your successes.**

Try not to be discouraged if you make a mistake or if sobriety doesn't come quickly to the alcoholic. His or her drinking patterns and your ways of reacting are probably long established. The important thing is not to stop trying and to take credit for your positive efforts.

#### **Pass on your knowledge.**

If you know people affected by alcoholism, you can help them understand the problems and needs of alcoholics and those close to them. Your insight will help alleviate their suffering and by helping others, you will help yourself.

#### **What is NCADD?**

NCADD is a national nonprofit organization combating alcoholism, other drug addictions and related problems through its National Office, more than 100 state and local Affiliates, and thousands of volunteers in communities throughout America. Founded in 1944, NCADD's primary mission is education, prevention and public policy advocacy.

NCADD provides education about alcoholism and other drug addictions as treatable diseases; offers prevention programs for schools, organizations and communities; dispenses medical/scientific information; answers questions from the public, legislative bodies, and the media; and distributes a variety of publications. NCADD also offers information and referral services to children, teenagers, and adults seeking help with alcoholism, other drug dependencies and related problems.

People seeking more information and/or referral can contact an NCADD Affiliate in their area or use NCADD's national toll-free help line: **1-800-NCA CALL.**



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# WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT SOMEONE ELSE'S DRINKING?



**NCADD**  
NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM  
AND DRUG DEPENDENCE, INC.

If someone you care about drinks too much, probably one of your greatest hopes is to see that person stop. You may already be trying very hard to make that happen, but if you don't understand the disease of alcoholism, your efforts may do more harm than good.

Don't blame yourself. You and the alcoholic are both victims of an insidious illness that breeds confusion, despair and anxiety. To understand the disease you have to learn what you're up against. This pamphlet can help you get started.

### *How Can You Identify Alcoholism?*

Alcoholics suffer from a disease. The disease is characterized by continuous or periodic: preoccupation with alcohol and impaired control over drinking. When alcoholics drink, they can't always predict when they'll stop, how much they'll drink, or what the consequences will be. Their thinking becomes distorted and they may continue drinking even though it causes personal, professional, family or school problems. Both alcoholics and those close to them commonly deny that drinking is having a negative effect on their lives.

While alcoholism has no known cure, the disease can be stopped. Alcoholics can recover once they completely abstain from alcohol and other addictive drugs. More than 1.5 million Americans are in recovery.

### *What Can You Do?*

#### **Learn about alcoholism.**

Resources such as NCADD Affiliates, certified alcoholism/addictions counselors and public or private alcoholism treatment programs offer sound and unbiased information. Many libraries and bookstores have sections on alcoholism, addictions and related subjects. Look for key phrases like "alcoholism/addiction," "chemical dependency" or "substance abuse" in literature and program names.

Members of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Al-Anon (a free self-help program for people affected by someone else's drinking) often know about nearby sources of informa-

tion and services. You can also look under "alcohol" in your phone book.

To find doctors, social workers, other health workers and clergy trained to work with alcoholics/addicts and their families, ask local hospitals, health departments and religious groups for recommendations.

NCADD offers a self-test called "What Are the Signs of Alcoholism" which helps people determine if they have an alcohol problem. For a free copy, send a self-addressed stamped envelope to NCADD, Public Information, 20 Exchange Place, Suite 2902, New York, NY 10005.

#### **Stick to the facts.**

Alcoholism is a disease, not a moral failure or lack of willpower. As you begin to accept this fact, you'll recognize that much of the alcoholic's behavior results from the illness. You shouldn't feel guilty or inadequate if you can't solve the problem.

Being impatient either with yourself or the drinker is a very normal way of responding to stress, but continuing to show impatience, scorn or disgust only shrinks you and your partner's self esteem. Instead, once you know the facts, develop a plan and try to concentrate on more constructive ways of dealing with the stress. Some suggestions follow.

#### **"Live and let live."**

You can be understanding without becoming too deeply involved in the drinker's problems. Ultimately, the drinker will have to take responsibility for dealing with the illness. In the meantime you have your own life to live.

#### **Seek help for yourself.**

Not only the drinker in your life needs help. One of the hallmarks of this illness is that it affects everyone close to the alcoholic. Your thinking becomes distorted. You and other family members need and deserve appropriate help in finding healthy ways to respond to the disease. You can't expect your partner to do something that you're not willing to do too.

Al-Anon and other programs focus on the

special needs of individuals affected by someone else's drinking. Adolescent children can find support at Alateen meetings and Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA) meet in most areas. If these programs do not exist in your community, talk to someone knowledgeable about alcoholism and someone who understands its impact on you and your family.

#### **Remember: you didn't cause the alcoholism, you can't control it and you can't cure it.**

Your partner may not stop drinking even if you get help for yourself. But by learning how to relate to your partner in healthier ways, you can boost the chances that the alcoholic will recognize the symptoms of the illness and seek help. At the very least, you will be better able to cope with the disease.

#### **Avoid "home treatments."**

Many partners try to solve the drinking problem by preaching, complaining, acting like a martyr, or reasoning with the drinker. These "home treatments" do not work—especially when the alcoholic has been drinking. They may drive the alcoholic farther away from you and needed treatment.

Trying to reason with the drinker or demanding different behavior may force him or her to lie or make unrealistic promises. Hiding or throwing alcohol away wastes time and money and allows you to focus on the drinking instead of yourself. The alcoholic may get angry and desperate, and will still find ways to satisfy the addiction. Keep in mind that the drinking is compulsive: he or she cannot stop from willpower alone. So your efforts to strengthen the willpower by coaxing, extracting promises or making idle threats won't work. Most important, don't expect the drinker to stop solely because he or she loves you.

#### **Don't become an "enabler."**

An enabler is a person close to the alcoholic who supports or "enables" the drinking, by pretending there isn't a problem (denial) or by

protecting or lying for the alcoholic. For example, cleaning up after the alcoholic, calling the office and making excuses for why the alcoholic can't come to work, or becoming the alcoholic's drinking partner make it easier for the drinker to continue drinking rather than face the reality of the disease. Group support like that found at Al-Anon meetings can identify and help you stop this kind of behavior.

#### **Tell children that alcohol changes how people act.**

Kids are affected by a heavy drinker's unpredictable behavior. Even three-year-olds can sense something is wrong. If you are married to an alcoholic, acknowledge the problem to your children. Younger children understand simple explanations like Mommy or Daddy has a disease, that the disease causes her or him to drink, and that it's difficult to stop.

Children tend to look to the non-alcoholic parent to stop the other's drinking. Explain that you can't control another adult's actions. Reassure them that it's not lack of love or anything they have done that causes the drinking.

#### **Protect yourself and your children.**

You may feel you must always be loyal to the alcoholic, but if your partner becomes violent or tries to drive after drinking, remember that you have a responsibility first to yourself and your children. Make advance arrangements for you and your children to stay with a relative or close friend in case of an emergency. Know the phone numbers of your police department and local shelter for battered spouses.

Don't get in a car with anyone who insists on driving after drinking. Plan alternate ways to get home if the drinker won't surrender the car keys. Never leave your children alone with a potential driver who has been drinking or is likely to in your absence.

#### **Take a good look at yourself.**

Many people who are closely involved with an alcoholic expect their own problems to go