

# What to expect when our loved one comes out of treatment

They might be busy with the following activities...

Appointments with case managers or mental health nurses or other workers

Continuation of peer support group meetings such as AA, NA, Smart Recovery

Contact with the justice system, such as parole officers or police

Regular follow-ups with GP

Continuation of counselling

## What can we do to support them?

Give them space and don't micro-manage their activities. Allow them to be responsible for managing their own time, routines and appointments, while still offering support

Don't give advice unless asked. It is important to let your loved one make their own choices about their treatment, so that they are empowered by their decision-making. Talk to them about their plans and read as much as you can about the treatment options available, but remember it is their choice

Be mindful that your loved one might have different plans to what you hope for. For instance, is abstinence their ultimate goal, or is it just the plan for a certain period of time? Do they plan to use substances in a controlled way or reduce their use? How will you cope if this is the plan? Often our own anxiety heightens if our loved one is choosing something other than abstinence - we may need to seek support to manage that anxiety

Consider what the strategy will be for substances in the home. Will there be alcohol kept in the house? What about prescription medications? What non-alcoholic beverages would your loved one like to have available? Think about dinner parties or visits from friends. Is your loved one comfortable with other people drinking in front of them? What sorts of non-alcoholic drinks will be made available at social gatherings?

***Involve your loved on in these conversations and try to make decisions together***

Include your loved one in family discussions about their levels of comfort in social events, family gatherings and activities. If they do not want to be involved in events, try not to take this personally. It is likely more to do with where they are at than anything to do with you

Your loved one may be really enthusiastic, in anticipation of a new life. Or they may be resentful and depressed, and not have much to say now that they are substance free. Both are common at this stage. Try to be patient with any mood swings or changes in behaviour. This may just be a phase and will change in time.

## Coping with lapse and relapses

Understand the difference between a lapse and a relapse. A relapse happens when our loved one stops maintaining their recovery goals. This is different to a lapse, which is a temporary departure from their goals - a 'stumble'

Prepare yourself for a lapse – they do happen and are a normal part of the process. Try not to be too disheartened or disappointed if it happens

Remind yourself that a lapse is not the end of the world. Your loved one has managed to seek treatment and stop using substances for a period of time, and that this is better than not making changes at all

When talking to your loved one about their lapse, try to focus on them and their needs rather than yourself. You can talk through your feelings with your own support system rather than 'lay it all on them'

Be mindful that your loved one may be fearful their old behaviour patterns are too hard to change. They may need constant reassurance that they're making positive steps. Build their confidence and self-esteem with acknowledgement and praise. Remind them of how far they have come. Encourage them to recognise that this stage is a short term 'lapse'.

There is nothing to be gained in chastising or telling them they have slipped backwards. They know what they have done and what they need to do to get back on track. Getting angry or upset will only cause conflict and may lead them to feel guilty or become secretive about what they are doing. It may also shift the focus away from what positive steps they need to take

Remind them of how long it has taken others you know to stop drinking, smoking or using substances. Try to normalise the relapse and maintain hope

## How can we support ourselves?

Keep reminding yourself about what you can and cannot control. What is your responsibility and what is theirs?

Practice being proactive and not reactive. Remember you don't have to find a solution to their dilemma or problem, that is something they need to do for themselves

Remind yourself of the reason you sought support and the fact that you are learning new strategies to help you cope. Try really hard to let go of your negative feelings and thoughts about the situation

Don't beat yourself up if you say the wrong thing or make a mistake. None of us are perfect. Try and think about how to do things differently next time

Try to pick up your own hobbies, interests and socialising. It is OK for you to have support and some fun even while this is going on