

# **Family Effects of Addiction**

The addiction to different substances, e.g. drugs, alcohol, etc., or activities, e.g. gambling, social media, etc., have different effects on the users' mental and physical health, and behaviour.

The effects of the use of these substances or activities in the family go well beyond the direct effects on the person using them.

Living with a loved one who uses drugs or alcohol has a huge impact on the whole family.

Here are some of the ways that families are affected:

## **Stigma**

People often feel that they can't share what they are going through with family or friends for fear that others will judge them or treat them differently as a result.

## **Isolation**

Stigma and the stress of dealing with substance use in the family can lead people to isolate themselves from friends, family, activities and social networks.

## **Stress and anxiety**

Living with a substance user can be unpredictable and causes stress and anxiety in many different ways. These can build up over time to high levels that are very difficult to live with, especially when people feel they have nowhere to turn.

## **Trauma**

Substance users can sometimes act in ways that cause trauma to those around them. This might be through abusive behaviours or a dramatic change in relationship dynamics.

## **Relationships**

Substance use can put huge strain on relationships, not just with the user themselves but throughout the wider family and social networks, as everyone struggles to find their own ways to cope.

## **Financial impacts**

Family members are sometimes the victim of criminal behaviour by their loved ones such as theft of property to sell for money to buy drugs or alcohol.

Others pay off substantial drug debts. If a substance user is unable to work or remains financially dependent this can also put additional strain on finances.

Some family members find themselves needing to reduce working hours to cope with the situation or may even be unable to work due to the stress it causes them.

### **Mental and physical health**

Stress, anxiety and feeling out of control for sustained periods can cause and contribute to the stress and difficulty of coping.

The effects of substance use on families are many and varied.

Family support groups exist to highlight the need for family support, develop best practice and enable families to find support.

We know support for families can reduce and mitigate the effects of the behaviour of and improve wellbeing so families can get back a sense of control over their lives.

Some family support groups with links:

Families Group of BDDG

Families Group of BDDG – London

Al-Anon

Families Anonymous

Co-Anon

Adfam

There is help available ..... you are not alone!