



# The Other Side:

Addiction's Effects on  
Family and Friends



**SILVER RIDGE**

A PREMIER PROGRAM BY PYRAMID HEALTHCARE

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## Introduction

Addiction is a disease that changes the brain's structures and functions, which in turn affects your thought and behavior patterns. But it changes more than your brain—far more. Recovering from an addiction is as much about repairing the damage addiction has done in your life as it is about ending substance abuse. From legal and financial troubles to physical and mental health problems, addiction takes a serious toll on nearly every aspect of your life. For most people, the majority of the damage done is to relationships, and that's why improving them is a major focus of a quality treatment program.

Support from friends and family members is a crucial factor for successful recovery. However, your relationships are probably somewhat complicated in one way or another, and this can make things awkward or distressing in the early months of sobriety.

This guide will help you understand how a person's addiction may affect friends and families. It will offer tips on navigating the complex relationships with your significant other, your adult children, your parents and your friends—including longtime co-workers—as you enter a new chapter in your life.

A woman with long brown hair and blue eyes is shown in a close-up, looking off to the right with a serious, somewhat distressed expression. In the background, a man is lying in a hospital bed, looking towards the camera but out of focus. The overall mood is somber and contemplative.

The Effects of  
Addiction  
on Family Members

Addiction doesn't just affect the person who has one. Everyone in the addicted individual's life is indelibly touched by the substance abuse, whether they've been lied to, manipulated, inconvenienced, embarrassed or abused.

Family members are generally the group most affected by addiction. The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence notes that addiction puts the family under an enormous amount of stress as normal routines are interrupted by upsetting experiences. This leads to unhealthy coping behaviors and destructive thought patterns as family members try to maintain some semblance of normalcy, even as they feel their world spiraling out of control.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, these unhealthy behaviors don't disappear once the addicted family member enters treatment. Just as it takes time to develop destructive thought and behavior patterns, it takes time to re-learn healthy ways of thinking and behaving.



## The Partner

The spouse or significant other of the addicted individual has likely been repeatedly lied to and manipulated. The everyday stresses and added financial and household responsibilities that come with living with an addicted partner take their toll on physical and mental health. Financial or legal problems may cause even more stress.

Spouses may engage in codependent or enabling behaviors, such as making excuses or removing consequences to keep the peace. They may take out frustration on the pets or the kids, and they'll likely develop unhealthy coping mechanisms like binge eating, excessive Internet use or compulsive shopping.

## The Parents

Parents of an adult child with an addiction have often given money to their child for rent or bills, even though they know the money may not go toward those things. They may enable the addiction by bailing their child out of jail, and they may be emotionally blackmailed with threats of suicide or starving, homeless grandchildren.

Somewhere between fear and anger lies hopelessness, because they've heard empty promises a million times, and they've been endlessly manipulated, but nothing seems to change. Often, they've paid for treatment that wasn't completed or didn't work. They feel helpless as their child continues abusing drugs or alcohol while they or a spouse and grandchildren bear the brunt of the consequences of the addiction.



## The Children

It's usually the children of an addicted parent who fare the worst. Children often believe that the addiction is their fault. Some act out while others withdraw, and some strive for absolute perfection, thinking it will make the parent stop using. They may live in fear that their parent will get hurt or go to jail. If the addicted parent is abusive, this type of trauma can cause serious mental problems down the road.

Children who live with an addicted parent are up to four times more likely than their counterparts to develop a substance use disorder later on, and they have a 68 percent higher risk of developing depression, according to Partnership for Drug-Free Kids.<sup>2</sup> In adulthood, they're likely to suffer from anxiety and emotional problems, have trouble self-regulating and use distorted reasoning and other harmful patterns of thinking.





Why Family Therapy  
Is Essential  
During Treatment

The good news is that the family issues that stem from an addiction can be effectively addressed through family therapy. Treating only the addicted person and not the whole family is of limited effectiveness.<sup>3</sup> An individual's environment has a dramatic impact on treatment outcomes, and a dysfunctional family environment is a particularly potent trigger for relapse. The importance of a functional home life during recovery can't be overstated.

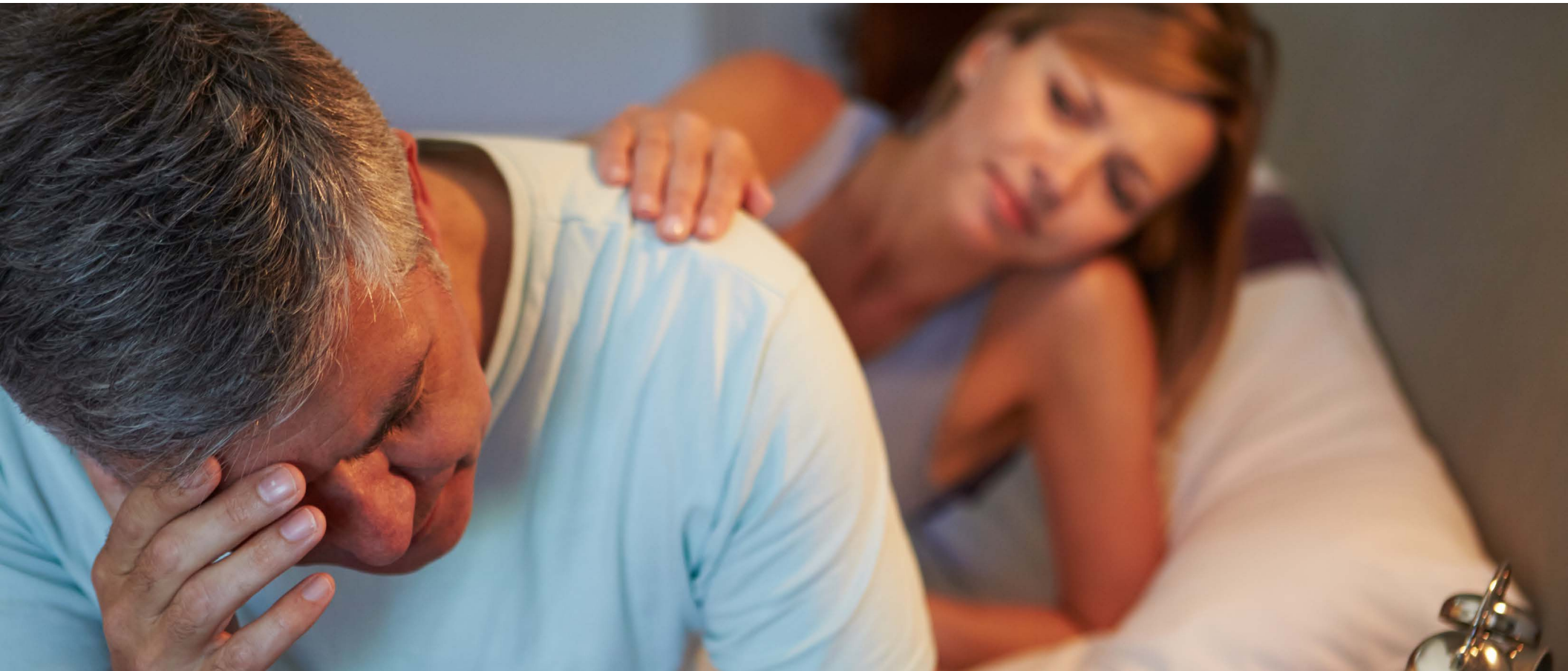
Family therapy is a cornerstone of a quality addiction treatment program. It operates on the assumption that the family is a system of different parts, and making changes together makes it easier for the family to transition into recovery together, united. Family therapy can have a profound positive effect on the family system, the unhealthy attitudes and behaviors family members have developed and the level of stress at home.

## **Improving the Functioning of the Family System**

By addressing the various complex issues in the family system, family therapy helps to improve its functioning. Families learn coping skills for dealing with difficult emotions like anger, resentment and regret, and they learn to communicate with each other more effectively, such as by improving their listening and observation skills and practicing honesty to prevent misunderstandings. A large body of research shows family therapy reduces the burden of stress on the family, prevents other family members from developing substance use disorders and improves how couples treat each other and how children behave.<sup>4</sup>

## Ending Co-Dependency and Enabling Behaviors

Family members of an addicted individual commonly develop an ironclad dependence on their loved one. This is known as co-dependency, and it's characterized by an excessive reliance on another person for emotional and self-esteem needs. Co-dependents tend to make most of the sacrifices in a relationship and focus the bulk of their energy on meeting the addicted partner's needs. Co-dependency is a major source of dysfunction in a family system.



## Common signs of codependency include:

- Low self-esteem
- Having a difficult time saying “no” to anyone
- Feeling responsible for the other person’s problems
- Blaming your own problems on the other person
- Reacting to the other person’s thoughts and feelings as a reflection of you
- Giving everything of yourself to help the other person with their problems
- Needing to be in control
- Lying to the person out of fear that the truth will hurt
- Problems with emotional intimacy
- Anxiety and fear about being a failure or being judged, rejected or abandoned
- Feeling trapped in the relationship
- Denial about being co-dependent

Co-dependency often leads to enabling behaviors, which allow the addicted loved one to continue abusing drugs or alcohol with few or no consequences. People who enable their loved one’s addiction may think they’re helping, but the reality is that it usually makes the addiction—and their own sense of well-being—much worse.



### Common enabling behaviors include:

- Ignoring the addicted family member's negative or dangerous behaviors
- Denying that a problem exists
- Difficulty expressing emotions
- Putting the addicted loved one's needs first
- Doing whatever it takes to avoid unsettling situations
- Lying to other people about the loved one's behaviors
- Making excuses for the loved one
- Blaming situations or other people instead of the addicted loved one
- Removing the consequences of the drug abuse
- Feeling angry, hurt and resentful toward the loved one while continuing the enabling

Just because the addicted family member stops using drugs or alcohol, it doesn't mean these co-dependent and enabling behaviors will automatically end. If they continue during treatment and beyond, they can quickly sabotage the progress made in recovery and contribute to a relapse. Identifying, addressing and changing these behaviors requires professional help, and family therapy is an important factor in ending co-dependency and enabling behaviors.

## Reducing the Stress Level in the Home

Stress is a major trigger for relapse, and reducing stress is an important focus in nearly every aspect of treatment, including family therapy. Family therapy helps to reduce stress by addressing problems in the family system, and it helps family members develop a toolkit of skills and strategies for reducing stress at home.





Therapy and Support  
for Family Members Can Help

In addition to family therapy, addiction experts recommend individual therapy for close family members affected by the addiction. Individual therapy helps family members identify their own issues and faulty thought and behavior patterns and make positive changes in their life for greater independence and happiness. This results in an increased ability to effectively support their loved one in recovery.

Along with individual therapy, joining a support group like Al-Anon offers family members a place to vent, share stories, get coping tips, find resources, celebrate milestones and help other families through their own journey in recovery.<sup>5</sup> This is an extremely valuable resource for families of an addicted individual, whether or not that person is in recovery.

Individual therapy for minor children in the family is also crucial and has been shown to help reduce their risk of substance abuse and other serious problems later on. In addition to therapy, the National Institutes of Health recommends that teens in the family engage with Alateen, a support group for the children of an addicted parent.<sup>6</sup> This free support group helps teens cope with the addiction through sharing experiences and coping skills, discussing difficulties and encouraging each other.





Forging a New  
Beginning  
with Your Significant Other



Addiction takes a huge toll on marriages and long-term relationships. Couples struggling with an addiction are four times more likely to divorce or break up than those who don't, and many of the break-ups occur once the addicted person is in recovery. However, experts across the board recommend that you shouldn't initiate any major changes in your life in the first year of recovery, including ending or starting a relationship.

Once you're in recovery, couples counseling can help you and your partner work through issues like anger, resentment, guilt and fear. It can help you both commit to a new relationship in recovery and develop healthier ways of communicating and thinking about the partnership. It helps you begin the process of re-building trust with your partner and making amends to repair the damage done to the relationship.

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**In addition to therapy, you can do a number of things to start repairing your relationship with your significant other.**

**Ask for time and patience.** During the early months of recovery, when you're heavily focused on maintaining sobriety, your partner may feel neglected. Find ways to let your partner know that they are important to you, such as by pitching in more around the house, spending enjoyable time together and communicating your feelings.

**Be honest.** Rebuilding trust, love and respect will take time, and it will require complete honesty from you. Be honest about your thoughts, emotions and actions. Call your partner if you're going to be late, and keep your word when you make a promise.

**Accept responsibility.** Taking responsibility for your past actions is crucial for rebuilding your relationship. Let your partner know often that you accept full responsibility for your past behaviors and are committed to restoring trust through your actions moving forward.

**Forgive yourself.** It may not be easy, but it's essential that you forgive yourself for the damage your addiction has done to the relationship. Holding on to guilt, shame and regret makes recovery that much more difficult. You can't change the past, but you can create a new future.

**Know that it will take time.** Be patient. It will take time to restore your relationship. Stay mindful in recovery, take care of yourself, be truthful and strive for personal growth. View every day as an opportunity to grow closer to your partner and show that you're committed to recovery and to the relationship. It's all you can do, and over time, it will likely lead to a better, stronger partnership.



Repairing  
Friendships and  
Family Relationships

*the 12-Step Way*

Over the course of your addiction, you may have lost or grown apart from friends, co-workers or family members due to your behaviors. Maybe you lied to, stole from or manipulated them, or maybe you withdrew from them in favor of using with a different set of friends.

An important focus of treatment and 12-step programs is evaluating your relationships and letting go of those that are toxic or destructive while repairing those that are healthy and valuable. Repairing relationships requires making amends, and Steps 8, 9 and 10 in 12-step programs are expressly concerned with doing just that.



## **The Eighth Step: Making a List of the People You've Harmed**

In Step Eight, you write down a list of all the people you wronged during your addiction. These may include small things, like instigating arguments or standing them up for dates, and big things, like stealing from them or verbally abusing them. It's important to withhold judgment during this step and forgive your friends and family members for any role they had in your treatment of them. This is about you identifying your past wrongs, regardless of whether and why you felt justified at the time. It's important that you don't minimize your wrongs by focusing on others' faults.



## The Ninth Step: Making Amends

In Step Nine, you go down the list and make direct amends to each person wherever possible. Here, you accept full responsibility for and accept the consequences of your past actions. This step is designed to remove your guilt, shame and regret and give you peace of mind that you've done everything in your power to make up for the past.

Most of your friends and family members will likely accept your apology and welcome the amends you choose to make. If some don't, that's okay. You will know you tried.

## The Tenth Step: Moving Forward

Once you make amends, it's important to move forward mindfully and with a close eye on your thoughts, attitudes and behaviors. Throughout every day, take inventory of your emotions, and pay attention to your interactions with others. When you're wrong, promptly admit it. When others are wrong, forgive them. Keep your focus on the progress you're making, and forgive yourself when you make mistakes.





# Coping with High-Risk Situations

Involving Family or Friends



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In some cases, you may encounter high-risk situations that can't be avoided, and the skills and strategies you learn in treatment will help you cope with them. A high-risk situation is one that can easily lead to a lapse or relapse. Examples of high-risk situations may be a family gathering where there will be a lot of drinking going on or where arguments are sure to break out or a required work-related event where alcohol will be served.

Preparing for this type of situation is crucial for successfully navigating it.

**Attend a meeting.** Before the event, attend a support group meeting and discuss the situation. Get advice, tips and strength from your sponsor and peers in recovery.

**Have support at the ready.** Have someone you can call for support if things turn sour. Better yet, bring a supportive friend or family member along if possible.

**Have an out.** If the situation becomes critical, have an out. Make excuses if you need to, or just leave. The most important thing is your sobriety, and if it's in danger, you must do what you must to do to extract yourself from the situation, even if that means offending someone.



Tips  
for Moving Forward

Entering recovery is starting a new life. Repairing and reestablishing relationships is an important focus, and these tips can help you succeed in your relationships and your recovery.

## **Be Active and Intentional**

Mindfulness and intention are crucial in recovery. Every day, stay mindful of your interactions with the people you hold dear, and live in the present. If you were absent from your relationship with your significant other, make an effort to be present now. If you neglected your children, show an interest in their lives and strive to be there for them moving forward. Show up for family events, and stay connected to your friends. Daily meditation or yoga can help improve your self-awareness and make mindfulness a habit.



## **Attend Meetings**

Maintaining a high level of engagement with your support group will help keep you honest and hold you accountable to yourself and others. It will provide support and advice from others going through similar circumstances in their various relationships. This support is invaluable during recovery, and regular attendance is essential for ongoing success.

## **Be Prepared for Resistance**

Just as it took time to damage your relationships, it will take time to repair them. You may have some friends or family members who simply aren't interested in reconciliation or forgiveness at this time. Don't be offended or discouraged. Instead, know that you're doing everything you can to make amends. Be patient, and keep trying when it's appropriate to do so.

## **Communicate**

Communicate honestly with your friends, family members and co-workers. Let them know you're working to restore your life and your relationships, and ask for support and patience. Ask what they need from you. Let them know what you need from them. Most importantly, always be truthful and mindful in your communications with others.

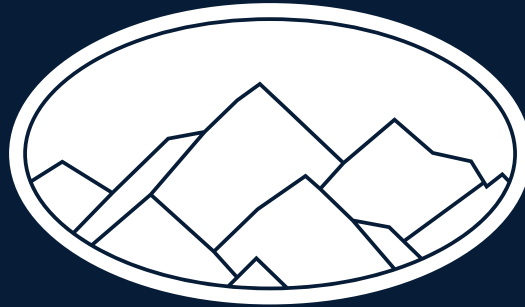


## Stay Hopeful

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration stresses that hope is the foundation of recovery.<sup>7</sup> Even if you have relationships that aren't on the mend right now and may never be, hold out hope for a better future. Nurture the relationships you can nurture, and let the others go for now, knowing that there's a possibility down the road that the relationship can be restored. The most important thing right now is that you surround yourself with loving, supportive and hopeful people who will play a key role in your successful long-term recovery and bring you happiness and joy.

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Silver Ridge serves established midlife adults who need to retreat discreetly from their daily lives. Here, we provide the perfect setting to focus on the addictions compromising your relationships, your future and your legacy.

**Every great legacy has a strong foundation. Build yours here.**