

Caring for someone who is dependent on alcohol or another drug



Carers talk about grief, loss and hope

The emotional rollercoaster of being a carer

We spoke to carers about what it is like to care for someone who uses alcohol or another drug.

Many described their caring journey as a rollercoaster ride of intense and often conflicting emotions. Carers describe being overwhelmed, anxious, angry, exhausted. Along with these very difficult feelings carers often told us that they have also found positive aspects to caring for someone.

“After a nine-year journey and my son finally in recovery, I can genuinely say that I am grateful for the experience. I am more patient, tolerant, accepting and loving – and therefore happier

– than I was before” - carer for her son who has schizophrenia and is recovering from using drugs.

Some of the carers we spoke to told us that they feel they are better people, happier or stronger as a result of having cared for another person.

Other carers spoke about feeling pleased that they are able to help and support someone that they love in a difficult time.

Often they felt that as a close friend or family member they were the best person to act as a carer because they are the ones most dedicated to getting the best services for the person they are caring for.

Expressing both positive and negative emotions

Grief and loss

Some of the more difficult emotions that carers may experience are feelings of grief and loss. Sometimes it is very hard to voice these feelings, for example feelings of sadness for the loss of an imagined life for you or your family member.

One carer told us about the ongoing grief that she experiences, even now that her daughter is recovering.

"You carry a grief with you, for the life that she has lost, the lost goals. My child didn't get to go to university, she will probably never marry or have kids, all those life goals are lost" - carer for her daughter who is recovering from drug use.

Many carers feel an enormous sadness about the lost opportunities for the person they are supporting as well as for themselves.

Managing your feelings

Whatever you are feeling it can be helpful to accept those emotions without self-judgement. It's OK to feel angry or sad or overwhelmed.

It can be helpful to talk to someone who understands. Seek professional support and find ways to manage your emotional responses. Look for a support group where you can meet other carers and share your experiences. You will find that you are not alone.

"You realise we are all just decent people, struggling to do our best" - carer for his son.

Finding hope

It can be hard to hold on to hope when you are supporting someone who uses alcohol or another drug. That person might not want to change, and as their carer that can be very hard to watch.

The carers that we spoke to said that the best thing they could do in that situation was to get help for themselves. Attending groups and taking care of their own mental health had a positive impact on the person that they are caring for.



Carers can benefit from professional assistance, one-to-one counselling and attending peer support groups.

More information is available through Carers NSW www.carersnsw.org.au and Carer Gateway www.carergateway.gov.au or call 1800 422 737

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