

Caring for someone who is dependent on alcohol or another drug



Looking after yourself as a carer

The caring experience can be a long and difficult journey

Many carers find it hard to balance their own needs with the demands of caring for another person. They may feel that they have no time or energy left to focus on their own well-being. We talked to carers and asked them how they managed to care for themselves while caring for another person.

*"Sometimes you feel so overwhelmed and you think - I can't do this anymore, something has to give. It's either her or it's me... At that point you have to decide that **YOU** are more important. You have to put your own needs first or you can't keep going" - carer for her*

daughter who has a mental health diagnosis and uses drugs.

When carers take time to look after their own needs they find it helps them to sustain their caring role and to be a more effective support person.

The importance of self-care

Carers are at increased risk for developing health problems including physical illnesses, depression and fatigue. If carers don't take care of their own physical and mental health they can find it impossible to keep supporting another person.

"Putting yourself first once in a while can help the person you are caring for" - carer for his son who uses drugs.

Carers need self-care

When carers are able to take care of themselves they can function more effectively in their caring role.

"You can't look after someone if you are struggling yourself. If you are not ok then you are no use to someone else" - carer for his son who uses drugs.

Ways to take care of yourself

Looking after yourself involves sustaining all aspects of your self, your physical, emotional, social, and intellectual health. Good self-care means being well in all of these different areas.

Physical health

This includes eating healthy food, finding time to exercise, sleeping well and seeing your own doctor when needed.

Emotional health

This could be finding a counsellor or therapist, or talking to other carers.

Social connections

Maintaining social connections for carers is important for good overall mental health and well-being.

Intellectual engagement

It can be sustaining and rewarding to have mental stimulation and purposeful involvement in society outside of your caring role.

Spiritual health

Spirituality can be anything that gives you a feeling of connection with something bigger than yourself. This could be through culture or religion, meditation, yoga or just being out in nature.

One carer told us that being in her garden and spending time with her animals gives her that sense of connectedness.

"The reality is that the other person might not want to change, they might never change. And you might not want to leave, but your life does not just have to be about surviving that person's addiction, it can be more than that" - carer for her ex-husband who is dependent on alcohol.



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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