

When Your Partner Has a Drug or Alcohol Problem

A Guide for Gay and Bisexual Men



It's tough enough when a friend has a problem with drugs or alcohol. It's even more complicated when your partner does. It's simply harder to see things objectively or to separate yourself from the effect of your partner's addiction when you're so emotionally, physically, and often financially intertwined. He needs help, and you need help. So who's left to help the relationship? *Can we both get through this together?*

This article offers some insight and advice on how to support your partner, yourself, and your relationship through this difficult period. Perhaps it will also validate your own experiences and even offer some hope. Before going further, however, it may be useful to read *When Your Friend Has a Drug or Alcohol Problem* for an overview of addiction, the recovery process, and effective helping strategies.

The course of addiction on relationships

Although every intimate relationship is certainly unique, predictable patterns often emerge when addiction joins the partnership. **As addiction develops and evolves, most couples experience parallel changes in how their relationship feels and functions.** The common progression looks something like this:

● Explanations

Early in the development of the addiction, **you and your partner explain away his occasional episodes of excessive drug use or drinking.** You may attribute them to unusual stress at work or a birthday celebration gone too far, for example. Although the events come and go, your anger, embarrassment, or disappointment may start to build up.

● Doubt and distrust

Soon you realize that your partner's drug use/drinking is not normal, and **you begin to pressure him to be more careful, cut down, or quit.** This can be especially difficult if you both drank or used drugs together, you now stop, but your partner doesn't. In

this case, your partner might see the problem not as his own substance abuse but as your sudden attitude reversal towards this once shared activity. Regardless, you now become the bad guy or the nagging mother in the relationship.

At the same time, **you try to hide his problem from the outside and keep up a good front,** which can become exhausting over time. You may notice more negative emotions creeping in. *Where is he? He's hungover and now I have to do all the yard work. What is he doing all night? I hate that I don't believe him.* As resentment and distrust emerge, so too might the apologies and promises not to let it happen again. You forgive again because you love him.

● Crisis

Now **you can no longer pretend everything is OK, and you spend much of the time going from crisis to crisis.** Life seems quiet for a while. Then all of

a sudden - another binge, another chunk of money gone, another 3-day disappearance, another lie that's backfired. The emotional roller coaster consumes your energy. You may feel helpless and unable to control the emotional or practical chaos of your own house-

"Prepare for nothing to happen right away. After I confronted my partner and he promised to work on his drug use, I got my hopes up. Then the bubble burst. He kept using and nothing happened. I realized that my main goal was just to get it off my chest. I let him know I was hip to what was going on. I was available when he was ready to talk."

