



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
MEL & ENID ZUCKERMAN COLLEGE OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Center for Rural Health

Support for Families Affected by Substance Use Disorders

**A Guide for Providers, Community
Health Workers and Representatives**

WHAT IS SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER? HOW DOES IT AFFECT FAMILIES?

A substance use disorder (SUD) is a chronic condition that involves repeated use of alcohol or other substances that leads to an impact on a person's physical and emotional health, relationships and daily responsibilities.¹ Not only does the impact of SUD affect those experiencing it, but it also impacts their families and loved ones.

Families may include parents, children, siblings, extended relatives, and chosen family members such as partners, spouses, stepchildren, and others who play an important role in a person's life. Substance use disorder (SUD) can shape family life in many ways — emotionally, relationally, and practically. Families may experience emotional strain, changes in roles and responsibilities, and uncertainty about how to best support their loved one, while also demonstrating resilience, care, and commitment to one another's wellbeing.

Supporting a loved one with a mental or substance use disorder can be challenging for individuals and families, and those growing up in a home with a family member experiencing SUD may have a higher risk for developing one themselves.² With understanding, support, and access to resources, families can strengthen protective factors and support both their own wellbeing and that of their loved one.

Understanding the ways SUD affects families, providers, community health workers, and representatives can offer support that is non-judgmental, trauma-informed, and responsive to the needs of the entire family system. Families do not have to navigate these alone, supportive resources and services are available.

FAMILY AND PEER SUPPORT SERVICES

Family and peer support services empower and guide families, friends, and caregivers who are supporting a loved one living with a mental health or substance use condition. They are known for their ability to use lived experience alongside specialized training to help others feel understood and supported while navigating recovery.

Family and peer support specialists assist families in learning about treatment and recovery options, connecting to counseling and community resources, and finding pathways through behavioral health systems of care. For those seeking direction or reassurance, family and peer support services can be an excellent place to start.

The **Mental Health Guild** provides free peer support groups across Arizona for SUD as well as numerous behavioral health disorders. **Narcotics Anonymous** additionally offers a 12-step recovery program with locations spread around the state with virtual meeting options. Finally, the **Family Involvement Center** features a broad array of services for families including counseling for SUD and behavioral health disorders; support navigating the justice system, child welfare, and special education; as well as youth programs.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT GROUPS

Community support groups offer safe, welcoming spaces for families, friends, and individuals to share experiences, learn coping strategies, and find encouragement from others who understand what they are going through. These groups help reduce isolation, strengthen connections, and foster resilience through shared understanding and mutual support.

The Haven features both inpatient and outpatient care with alumni and family support that builds community both within and outside of their locations. **Sabino Recovery** offers similar services and highlights their trauma first model. In order to find further community support groups as well as additional services, the **Opioid Assistance Referral Line** can help locate services nearby. You can follow the link to their website or call them at 1-888-688-4222.

TREATMENT AND RECOVERY PROGRAMS

Treatment and recovery programs connect individuals and families to coordinated services that address substance use and related mental health needs. Care can look different for everyone and may include outpatient counseling, intensive outpatient or residential treatment, and continuing care for long-term support.

Many programs also offer medication treatment, recovery housing, employment services, and peer-based supports that promote stability and healing.

To find a treatment program near you, visit the [SAMHSA Treatment Locator](#) or call the [Opioid Assistance and Referral Line](#) (1-888-688-4222) for guidance and information about local services. If you are specifically interested in Medication Assisted Treatment, use the [Buprenorphine Practitioner Locator](#) to identify your nearest facility.

MEDICATION SAFETY AND DRUG DISPOSAL:

Keeping medications stored and handled safely helps protect everyone at home. Unused or expired prescriptions should be kept in a secure place until they can be disposed of properly to prevent misuse or accidental ingestion.

Many pharmacies and healthcare centers across Arizona have take-back programs and secure drop-off kiosks where medications can be safely discarded. Pharmacists can also share information about naloxone, a medicine that can reverse an opioid overdose and is available without a prescription in Arizona.

The [AZDHS Prescription Drug Drop Off Site Map](#) highlights various locations around the state that will allow you to drop off any unused prescriptions. Additionally, you can call your local pharmacy to ask if they participate in any take-back programs or if they know of any nearby participating locations.

WELLNESS AND RESILIENCE PRACTICES:


The simplest ways to manage the impact of a loved one's substance use can often be the most unrecognized. While formal treatment and community supports are essential, ongoing wellness within the home plays an important role in maintaining stability, strengthening relationships, and supporting recovery. The health and balance of the household matter just as much as the recovery of the person experiencing substance use challenges.

Keeping regular routines can help maintain a sense of calm and stability. Staying connected with supportive people, spending time outdoors, and making space for rest all strengthen emotional health. Physical activity supports both body and mind. Taking time to appreciate small positive moments or reflect on good memories can help families stay hopeful and connected.

Simple, steady efforts such as sharing meals, engaging in open conversations, or spending quiet time together can bring comfort and foster healing within the household.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR PROVIDERS

Providers, community health workers, and representatives play an important role in shaping how families experience support when substance use affects a loved one. Offering information with empathy, avoiding judgment, and recognizing the strengths and challenges within each family system can help reduce stigma and build trust. By connecting families to appropriate resources and encouraging care for the wellbeing of the entire household, providers can support safer, more compassionate pathways forward.



We respectfully acknowledge the University of Arizona is on the land and territories of Indigenous peoples. Today, Arizona is home to 22 federally recognized tribes, with Tucson being home to the O’odham and the Yaqui. The University strives to build sustainable relationships with sovereign Native Nations and Indigenous communities through education offerings, partnerships, and community service.

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