

For partners



Adfam

Families, drugs and alcohol

Living with a drug user



Foreword

We're aware from the people we work with that partners of drug users often find it difficult to cope with drug use and to get support for themselves. At Adfam we speak to people every day who are anxious about drug use, some are angry, some worried, some are both – but what people have in common is that they care. They want to understand what is happening and what can be done to improve the situation. Although there are no easy solutions to the problem of drug use we hope that this booklet will help you to cope better with the situation you find yourself in and that it encourages you to think of different ways of finding support – both for the person close to you using drugs and yourself.

When dealing with drug use it is easy for the focus to fall entirely on the person using drugs and although we have included positive ways in which you can help your partner, this booklet is equally for you and has also been written to help you think about yourself and your needs which are as important as those of your partner.

It is also important to say before we go any further that in this booklet when we use the term partner we're referring to a person of any gender or sexual orientation who has a close relationship with a drug user.

All names in this booklet have been changed to protect anonymity.

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1. Introduction

Before we go any further we need to spend some time to think about what is understood by the term 'drug use'. We all have opinions about the subject. These opinions may be formed through our own personal experiences, or those of people we know and the culture and society we live in. Our opinions may also be influenced by extreme stories in newspapers, magazines or on television.

Drugs have been around for thousands of years and many drugs which are now illegal, including cannabis and cocaine, were legal in this country until the last century. The word 'drug' in itself is also very confusing - some people use this term to describe all substances which change the way a person thinks or feels. This would include illegal drugs, medicines, alcohol, tobacco, volatile substances (e.g. glue sniffing) and caffeine. Others might use this term to refer specifically to illegal substances. People use drugs for a variety of reasons – often they take drugs initially out of curiosity and may continue simply because it's fun and enjoyable. A recent survey found that 28% of the population over the age of 16 had taken illegal drugs at some point – this is about 13 million people. This figure increases to 51% of the population aged between 16 and 24¹.

Drug use is a complex problem for our society to face and despite the increased prevalence of illicit drug use in society it is still an issue on which people have widely divergent views and you may well have very different views to your partner. Many people have to take drugs to control illness or pain; others will take drugs because they can make them feel better or just able to cope with their lives more easily.

Potentially all drugs can have unpleasant or dangerous side effects, although those prescribed to us by a GP, legally produced and taken in a controlled way are potentially safer than drugs which are not managed in this way. It is a fact that we live in a world where drug use is a part of everyday life. Before you begin to try to talk to somebody or support them it will be important for you to think about your own attitudes towards drug use – for example you may feel that drinking alcohol or smoking cannabis is acceptable but that injecting heroin is not.

Some people who use drugs quite regularly do so in a fairly controlled, recreational way. This doesn't mean they are addicted to the drugs they use – just as having a few drinks regularly doesn't make someone an alcoholic.

¹ ICM Research for The Observer, 2002

Recreational drug users tend to use drugs as their way of having some fun or relaxing. This can be really hard for somebody else to understand as it is easy to focus on the problems drugs can cause but there are also perceived benefits for the user e.g. many drugs are cheaper than alcohol and the 'come down' or 'hang-over' is felt to be not as bad as with alcohol.

It is also important to remember that only a very small number of people who experiment with drugs go on to use them regularly or in a dependent way and most do not come to any harm. The number of people who come to harm as a result of using cigarettes or alcohol, far outweighs the number of people coming to harm as a result of using illegal drugs. This is not intended in any way to diminish your concerns about someone's illicit drug use – but it is important to think through our attitudes towards drug use and how they have been formed.

Some people, albeit a small number, of those who use drugs come to depend on them as a way of coping with life – not just as a way of having some fun. They can start to need the drugs just to feel normal. A dependant drug user may be taking drugs to block out physical or emotional pain or to distance themselves from difficulties they face in their lives e.g. loneliness, family or relationship problems, low self esteem, illness, poverty, housing difficulties or unemployment. For people in this position, drugs can provide a lifestyle, a structure to their lives, a reason for getting out of bed.

It may be that the person you are close to is in this position and you want to know where you can get help and the next section highlights the type of services that are available and how you can access them.

2. What Support Services are available?

Coping with drug use can seem an impossible task - but it is one that you and the person you are close to who is using drugs do not have to face alone. There are services available to help you across the country. Some of these can be accessed directly and some you can be referred to by a social services or health care worker. The majority of drug treatment services are free but some may require funding applications to be made – this can usually be done by drug treatment workers. Of course, there are also private facilities for which you will have to pay although some of these facilities also accept funded service users.

Drug Services

Drug services exist across the country. They can offer support to a drug user at any stage, whether they are not ready to think about changing their behaviour but need some advice, or they're at the stage of thinking about cutting down, or they're determined to come off drugs. They provide a wide range of services for users including some, or all, of the following: prescribing, methadone programmes, counselling, help with withdrawal/detox, complimentary therapies such as acupuncture, housing or debt advice, education and training, medical advice, needle exchange facilities, support groups, day programmes, drop in sessions, help to find employment and outreach workers supporting users in the community.

Those who work in drug services understand the difficulties drug users face and will usually be approachable and sympathetic to their needs. They will do their best to offer whatever support they can to your user, but it's important to bear in mind the following:

- there may be long waiting lists for an initial appointment, medication or inclusion in a treatment programme
- many drug services have been set up to support long term adult drug users and may not have the facilities to offer the sort of support a person using drugs such as ecstasy or cannabis might need
- users who have been on treatment programmes but who have not managed to stick to the regime (e.g. those on methadone programmes whose urine tests have tested positive for the presence of heroin or other drugs) may have to go to the bottom of the waiting list before they can join such programmes again and, in some cases, they may no longer be considered suitable for such programmes.

In spite of these limitations however, contact with a drug service can provide a lifeline for many users and having a relationship with a drugs worker can be very valuable for a user at any stage. You can find out where the local services are to you by calling the National Drugs Helpline or visiting their website.

Many partners have found it very difficult when they've discovered that they will not be very involved in their partner's treatment or that there is very little in terms of support for themselves available from a drug service. It's important to remember though, that these services have been set up to treat the user's needs as their priority. In order for trust to build up between them and your partner, they need to guarantee confidentiality so that your partner can feel safe enough to explore all their problems. In just the same way that your partner's needs have an impact on you, your needs have an impact on them and, like you, they might need outside support to look at these issues. So having separate support/counselling for both of you could be helpful.

Counselling Services

For many people, coming off drugs successfully will mean that they will need to sort out other underlying issues in their life that might have contributed to their drug use. Many drug services will be able to provide some level of practical support and counselling to users, but it could be helpful for a user to consider having other counselling especially if they have a lot of difficulties to come to terms with. Bear in mind however, that people need to be stable and ready to work on themselves for counselling to be appropriate. Also, counsellors will not necessarily be specialists in dealing with drug problems so, if a user has a severe drug problem, they may not be able to help until the user is more stable.

If your partner would like counselling, they could speak to their GP as they can sometimes arrange counselling sessions. (They don't have to mention their drug use, they could just say that they're finding it difficult to cope and would like to see a counsellor if possible.) Adults (those aged over 25) can also find out about counselling services in their area through the British Association for Counselling and Youth Access can provide details of counselling services for those under 25.

Residential Rehabilitation Centres

These services provide a supportive environment in which people whose lives have become chaotic and unstable as a result of drug problems can learn how to cope with life without drugs. Rehabilitation centres have a variety of approaches for helping and supporting people, so it's important for a user to become informed about the services on offer, in order to decide

what approach they might feel most comfortable with. However, many local authorities have contracts with specific centres, so the amount of choice a user has may be limited.

Anybody considering going into a rehabilitation centre will need to think about the following:

- In most cases people need to be drug free before entering
- places at rehab are expensive and funding for a place needs to be arranged in advance. To obtain funding for a place users will need to be assessed for need via Social Services and this funding is very limited so there can be very long waiting lists for funded places.
- a user will be required to go for an interview at a centre to see if they are suitable for the programme being offered. There is often a gap between being accepted on and starting the actual programme so the process of getting into rehab can be lengthy.

It can also be very helpful for a user to talk with their local drug service about going to rehab because they will be able to help with the process of being assessed for funding etc. Local drug services may also be able to provide similar services to those on offer at rehab within the community.

Self Help Groups

Organisations such as Narcotics Anonymous (NA) or Cocaine Anonymous (CA) also hold meetings around the country for users to attend for ongoing support. These services were set up by ex-users themselves, to help other users and some people have found attending these meetings to be really useful in helping them cope.

Support Services for You

As well as seeking support for your user it is also important to consider your needs and there are services available for you as well.

Anita rang up about her partner, Tom. He had recently come out of prison. He'd always dabbled with drugs but Anita had just found out that he'd started using heroin while inside.

"I was just so angry with him. I'd been managing on my own, visiting him every week even though the prison was miles away, looking after the kids etc, because I knew he'd be out in four months and everything could get back to normal then; He moaned about being inside but it wasn't exactly a party for

me on the outside either - and now things can't get back to normal because he's hooked on heroin! We went along to a drug service together but I left feeling absolutely furious because all the drug worker seemed to want to focus on was how I could support Tom. It's not that I don't want to support him but I had all these feelings stored up inside me so I couldn't just flip a switch and be able to think only of what I could do to help him. I needed help myself and instead I was made to feel like I was part of the problem."

Getting outside support for yourself means that you can have time to consider your own feelings and needs and put them first for a change. Although there are not as many services available for the friends and families of drug users as there are for users there is support out there, some drug services offer support to family members but there are also specific support services just for families and friends. Many of these have been set up and continue to be run by people with first hand experience of dealing with somebody else's drug use. Some offer support over a telephone helpline and others run family support groups – you can find a list of the services in your area on the Adfam website.

3. What about me and my needs?

A great many people in the world lead productive lives whilst still regularly using drugs be it cigarettes, alcohol or cannabis. Although it is understandable that you may be unhappy about your partner's choice of lifestyle, there is no formula which can be applied to make someone stop using drugs. It's important to let your partner know how you feel about their continuing to use drugs and to see what, if any, room there is for compromise in your situation if you are to continue to see them or live together for the time being. You may need to decide whether you are willing to accept your partner's choices or not and this may ultimately come down to you thinking about whether you wish to continue with the relationship or not.

If you do not feel ready to make this decision yet, then it could be helpful to put your energy into thinking about how your living situation can be made more bearable. What sort of changes need to be made to the situation in order for you to be able to continue to be with each other? Can you talk with each other about what you both see are the problems and how they could be sorted out?

It is worth thinking first about how you have been communicating with each other. It is very easy to get into the habit of shouting at each other and making threats. When we're angry or upset it's often difficult to do more than just focus on expressing our feelings. Obviously you need to let your partner know how you're feeling about the situation, but sometimes it's difficult to do any more than that in the heat of the moment. What do you feel are the issues that need to be sorted out? What do you need from your partner? What do they need from you? These are the things that we often never get around to talking about when we're feeling emotional, especially if our feelings are rebuffed because then we can end up never getting past how we're feeling.

Sue said of her relationship with Matt,

"I was so sick of talking about what seemed to be the same old things. I thought that I was being very clear about what I saw were the problems -why does he get so stoned all the time? Why was he never at home? Why did he have no consideration for my feelings? It wasn't until I was talking to somebody and I was asked how Matt's behaviour was really affecting me, that I realised how long it had been since we'd actually talked to each other about what our problems really were. I sobbed my heart out for a good 15 minutes and told the counsellor that I was so tired of the whole situation that I guess I'd given up on Matt and just used to shout at him for being such a

waster and then he'd get really defensive and storm off. When I did finally manage to talk calmly with Matt he said that he knew deep down his drug use wasn't making things any better but that there were other issues we really needed to talk about and sort out."

Try not to make sweeping statements about your partner's behaviour or simply focus on the drug use. Be specific about how their behaviour affects you, regardless of what's causing their behaviour: how does their unreliability, their moods, lack of money affect you (and possibly your children)? Think about what problems their actual behaviour causes for you. Try also, to encourage your partner to talk with you about what they see are the problems. It may also be worth thinking through what the good/bad things are that may happen if your partner continues to use drugs and discuss your answers with your partner as a way of flagging up some of the problems you face as a result of their behaviour.

Remember this conversation may be painful for both of you, but acknowledging what the problems actually are is the first step towards being able to solve them. You could write your thoughts and feelings down in a letter if you're worried about having such a conversation. If so, try to ask questions in the letter which will encourage your partner to join in with getting things out in the open. You could leave the letter for them to read in their own time and ask them about how they felt about what you said later, or you could ask them to read it while you're there with them.

If you manage to identify what you both see are the actual problems, try to discuss between you how you might go about sorting them out. Remember that within every relationship there are often some big problems and some ongoing irritations (which can become big problems if they're not addressed). Don't expect to be able to sort everything out at once; you will need to decide between you what are the most important things in the short and longer term and how you can both work on them.

Gary rang Adfam in desperation because his partner, Michael, had been taking speed for over a year.

"Whenever I tried to talk to Michael about his drug use, he would say that he had it under control, that it wasn't a problem and then walk away. The person at Adfam asked me to talk through how our conversations would go and I realised that all I ever seemed to focus on was the drug use, not how I was affected by it or why Michael might be doing it. I decided to try and change the way I talked about our situation and next time I asked him why he had got more and more into drugs. Michael told me about feeling depressed because he was unemployed and bored and how the drugs had become a way to pass the time and make himself feel better. I realised that I'd been

banging on about him getting help for his drug use when perhaps what he needed more was help to make his life more satisfying. He said he also felt ashamed that I was earning all the money for us to live on which made him angry at me. I was fed up with him always being out of it so we never seemed to have any decent time together and I guess I also felt frustrated that I couldn't see how I could help him and was probably taking that frustration out on him. Once we were able to really talk about the problems we were facing it was so much easier to look at how we could sort them out."

If your partner is willing to take responsibility for sorting out their part in some of your other problems, could you accept their drug use for the time being? What else could you ask of your partner in return for your being willing to accept their drug use for now?

Mary said about her relationship with Alan:

"We've always sorted our own problems out as a family but his drug use was something that we kept fighting about and never got anywhere. I was nervous about seeing a counsellor but, once I met her, it was a tremendous relief not to feel like I was treading on broken glass all the time, that I could say whatever I felt like without having to be careful of my words. It was great just to have the time to think about myself. Alan didn't like the idea of counselling at first but, one day, I told him that unless he went to see somebody to try and sort himself out that I would have to leave him. I hated giving him an ultimatum like that but things had got so bad I felt I had no other choice. We sort of avoided each other for a while but gradually he found it helpful to talk about things in his life that he was finding difficult and we started to find a way of supporting each other. Beforehand, it just felt like I had three children instead of two to look after, now I feel like I'm getting my husband back bit by bit."

If you want to spend more time together, how could this be achieved? What would both of you need to do to make this possible? Would they need to be less under the influence of drugs, would you need to make some time to do things together? If you've not wanted to spend time with them, what has got in the way to make you not want to be around them and how could these things be resolved? If you have very different interests, is there anything you have in common that you could do together?

If you find it difficult to trust each other, has trust broken down simply as a result of drug-related behaviour or have other difficulties in your relationship contributed to a lack of trust between you? It could help to start telling each other about why you feel you can't trust each other and to look at how you can help each other rebuild trust between you.

Unfortunately, your partner may not be willing to make any changes to their lifestyle or behaviour. If this is the case, you'll need to think very carefully how you're going to cope and about your reasons for staying in such a relationship. You will have to work out for yourself what you are prepared to live with, what will have to change for you to feel it's worth staying with your partner and how long you can wait for these changes to take place. Your partner may have a lot of work to do to sort themselves out which could take a long time and you may have to think carefully about whether you can wait for them to do this. Sometimes relationships may end because people need things that their partner is not able to provide rather than because people no longer care about each other. Even if you really want the relationship to work out, it is important to consider all your needs, whether they can be met through your relationship and, if not, how else your own needs could be met.

The effects of being in a relationship with someone who is using drugs can be so overwhelming that it's hard to think about anything else, but your quality of life matters too. It's very important that you allow some time for yourself - there is more to your life than just being someone's partner or, if you have children, being a mother or father. You might see your role as looking after others but who looks after you?

Your life can be so disrupted by the presence of drugs, that you can't stop talking or thinking about anything else. But your needs are important and if you don't think about your needs, the presence of drugs in your relationship could make you unwell – not just your partner. Is there someone else who can take over things or can things look after themselves for a short while? Even having a long soak in the bath could help reduce some of your stress.

Are there any activities that you used to enjoy but have let slip, like going to an evening class, that you can work back into your life even just occasionally? Spending a little money on something for yourself (even if it's only a bar of chocolate) is just as important - if not more important - than getting something for your partner or others in your family. Things that pamper you can help give you strength to carry on. They are not just silly little extras. All of us need to treat ourselves now and then as incentives to keep going.

Sometimes your partner's behaviour may causes problems that cannot be ignored because they have a direct impact on you.

What about money problems?

Many of the people we speak to say that all the money coming into the house is going on drugs. How is this happening? -Is it because your partner is the one who brings in the money and you never actually see any of it or is it because your partner is stealing from you or are you handing it over to them?

Unfortunately, you'll have to make decisions about whether things can continue this way. There's no easy way around this. You'll need to talk to your partner and/or find some way of having access to some money.

- Perhaps you might be able to earn some money for yourself if you're not already doing so. If you do this you should insist that this money is spent on the home or what you (or your children) need.
- If your family are in receipt of benefits how is this money being spent? If you're not getting to see any of this money you will need to think about how this can be changed. Can you ask your partner or do you need some advice about how to sort this out? Your local Citizens' Advice Bureau may well be able to help.

We hear of many situations where people have given money to their partner as a way of keeping them out of trouble. It's easy to get sucked into supporting someone's habit for the best of reasons. Doing this, however, can often just help them to continue taking drugs and leaves you having to cope with the consequences of their continued drug use - so nothing changes. If someone is determined to keep using drugs it's their choice. We can't make them stop, but we can stop allowing ourselves to be affected by the choices they are making by making some choices ourselves.

Sharon said of Mark,

"I was so scared that he would end up in jail that I ended up taking extra weekend work to get the money for the drugs. In the end I began to realise that I had no life at all and that maybe all I was doing was helping him to keep on taking drugs. So I started using the money I was making to spend on me and the kids. I stopped making it easy for him to continue using".

Although it is understandable that you may wish to prevent your partner from resorting to crime or ending up in jail, you could inadvertently be making it easier for them just to keep on taking drugs rather than change their behaviour. Sometimes it is only when a user starts to feel some of the negative consequences of their behaviour that they finally consider changing it. If you keep on providing money to fund their drug use you may be postponing the time when they consider sorting out their drug use. The time may also come when you cannot provide enough money to fund their use and what happens then?

Many people who use drugs can get into debt through trying to finance their drug use. It might be possible for your partner to arrange to pay their debts

back in instalments as the person owed money will most likely prefer to get some back rather than none at all. Sometimes a drug user can end up owing large sums of money to drug dealers and pressure can be put on you to pay these debts. This situation can be especially difficult if threats are made to harm your partner or you, but unfortunately, there are no easy answers to this situation. If you are being threatened, then it will be important to inform the police.

What about theft?

You may be in a situation where money or property is going missing from your home. Some partners have told us that they believe that it's better that their property is going missing rather than other people's, but if their behaviour has got to the stage where they're stealing to finance their lifestyle, they may use up all your resources and then move on to other people's anyway. If you replace things, only to have them stolen again, are you sending a message to your partner that you are a never-ending supply of money to finance their lifestyle? It's important that you find a way of making it clear that you won't accept this behaviour - even if that means getting outside help involved.

What about children?

If you have children there may be many things that you are worried about. It may be that you are concerned about your partner leaving their drugs or gear around where your children could get hold of them - if so, can you ask them to keep their equipment out of reach of the children? It may be that they are taking drugs in front of the children - can they be asked to take their drugs in private?

If they won't listen to your concerns and agree to think about your children's safety, you will need to take the responsibility for looking after your children on your own even if this seems unfair. If you are mainly responsible for looking after your children and you need a break, is your partner ever capable of looking after the children for a while?

Would they need to reduce their drug use or would they have to have stopped completely for you to feel they are capable of looking after the children? If you feel that your partner is not able to look after them, perhaps you could try and find someone who can help look after your children e.g. another member of your family or a playgroup or after-school club. Even if it is just for a couple of hours a week it could make a big difference.

Having young children can, in itself, be isolating and this may be especially so if you have concerns about family or friends finding out about your partner's drug use.

You probably feel that it's important for your children to have contact with both parents but is your partner spending time with them when they're not under the influence of drugs or are they always 'stoned'? You might need to think about the quality of that contact. It might also be helpful to let your children know that their mother or father is not well.

Perhaps the fact that your partner is a drug user has put them off seeking support because of fears that the family will be split up? Maybe such fears have made you hesitate to seek support too? Remember that a person seeking help before things have got out of hand will be seen as acting much more responsibly than a parent who puts off seeking help because of such fears. Drug use in itself is not enough reason for a child to be removed from a family.

If you're afraid your partner will leave if you make any demands on them, can you honestly say to yourself that you will accept any behaviour as long as they stay with you? Contemplating being on your own might be a very frightening step, but there may come a time when you'll need to ask yourself what you're really getting out of this relationship if your partner has so little consideration for you.

What about sex?

Drug use may affect your partner physically in many ways. Some drugs may make people have a bigger sexual appetite, some may make them go off sex altogether. Your partner's behaviour may make your sexual appetite disappear altogether too! It's important that you talk about this with each other. If they've made you angry/depressed/exhausted and you're not in the mood, it's important for you to explain why even if it feels obvious to you.

Maria rang the helpline about her partner, Manny:

"Manny used to make me so mad. I'd be tense all the time worrying about things. He'd disappear off and I would be scared he'd topped himself. Then he'd come in and want to go to bed. It seemed so obvious to me why I wouldn't be in the mood but I think he felt I was trying to punish him by not having sex. I suppose he wasn't able to understand what I was feeling and I'd never have the energy to talk about this. We'd just end up shouting at each other. Now, if he annoys me, I've taken to writing him a note telling him exactly how I'm feeling..."

If you're being forced to have sex against your will, it could really help you to get some support. The Women's Aid Helpline or Male Advice Line can help.

If your partner injects drugs and shares their equipment they could be at risk of catching diseases including HIV and hepatitis and potentially passing them on to you if you have unprotected sex with them. You should always practice safe sex e.g. use a barrier method of contraception, such as a condom. If you're concerned about HIV/AIDS or want more information, it may be useful to ring the National Aids Helpline or the Terrence Higgins Trust.

What about violence?

Sadly, many of the people Adfam work with are concerned about their partner's violent or destructive behaviour. Many people make allowances for such behaviour because they see it as being as a result of the user suffering or being ill. However, if their behaviour is threatening your safety or other members of the family then it is vital that you find a way of showing that this is unacceptable. You have rights too, especially the right to be safe in your own home. If such behaviour continues, you must put your and other family members' safety first. This may mean either having to get your partner to leave home, or you having to leave yourself. If asking them to leave has not worked or you are frightened about how they will react then you must get help. This could be from another family member, friend or even the police or social services.

If your partner has been violent in the past and you have accepted such behaviour, you run the risk of them being violent every time you behave in a way they don't want you to, which won't be any good for you or them in the long run, and you run the risk of being worn out by the situation and possibly seriously hurt.

We know that leaving a relationship is a difficult step to take because, despite everything, you might still be very emotionally involved with your partner. However, you are responsible for making sure that you are safe, and if that means leaving a situation because it's dangerous, you owe it to yourself to put your safety first. That doesn't mean that you have to leave the relationship permanently but you need to be safe first and foremost. Please think about yourself because, if your partner is being violent, they are not thinking about you at all.

Should I still be living with them?

If your partner's behaviour has become totally out of control and you are not able to ask for some consideration of your needs, then perhaps you should consider whether they should still be living with you or you should still be living with them. Many people have reached this stage but are worried about what will happen to their partner if they have to leave home. These concerns are understandable but your quality of life matters too. If they are determined

to live a certain lifestyle, it doesn't mean that you have to let their actions destroy your life too.

Adam said:

"At first I felt guilty about even thinking about leaving Diane. I was worried she might go off the rails completely and I was really frightened she might die, But then I realised that my staying wasn't making any difference to the situation. In fact, I was starting to suffer from all the stress involved and was taking days off work because I was so tired and my blood pressure went through the roof. It had always seemed selfish to think about me and how I was doing, knowing how low she was, but I finally decided that I couldn't do anything more for her while she was always out of her head. I took our two-year-old daughter, Alison, with me. I worried about her not seeing her Mum but I did not feel that Diane could look after her. I didn't see Diane for a couple of months but I kept in touch with her mother. Diane is still taking drugs but she seems to be trying to sort herself out. She's asking to see Alison now so I hope that's a good sign. To anyone else who is feeling that they have tolerate a situation like mine, please think about yourself as well as worrying about your partner. Your sanity and health is just as important".

Deciding whether to leave a relationship or not is never easy, but you should ask yourself what is there for you in staying in a relationship with someone who isn't considering any of your needs or thinking about taking care of you ever? If you choose to leave it doesn't have to be permanently. Your leaving might be what prompts them to think about making changes to their behaviour which could lead to you being more able to consider having a relationship with them again. Being away from a situation that has caused you so much distress could also do you a lot of good and allow you to concentrate more on yourself for a change.

4. I want to help my partner but how do I go about it?

If your partner is at the stage where they are looking to stop or change their drug use you may be looking to more information about how you can support them in this and what is involved in coming off or cutting down the use of drugs and how you can both prepare for this change.

Whether your partner needs help to stop or change their drug using behaviour will depend on their own feelings about this and which drugs and how many they have been taking. We mention changing their drug using behaviour as well as stopping as many people may not wish to stop using drugs altogether, even if that is what you desperately want them to do. Remember that any move by your partner to use drugs in a more controlled or safe way is better than continuing as they have before. It is a sign that they are wanting to change, even if it is only gradually. This may be the most they can aim for at this time.

Remember that a user can be given all the help in the world, but, in the end, it will be up to them to find the willpower to stop or reduce their drug use. Think about how it can be for you, for instance, to try and lose weight or give up smoking or something else you enjoy which isn't perhaps very good for you. Those around you can give you all sorts of advice and support, but they can't stop smoking the cigarettes for you. The same will be so for your partner.

Before they actually start to make a change in their drug use it could be very helpful for your partner to think about the following:

What are their reasons for using drugs?

Answering this question could take some thought, because many people will simply come up with 'because they make me feel good'. Therefore it's important for them to consider carefully all the reasons for their drug use. Remember, the reason that someone starts taking drugs could be only part of the reason why they continue to take them. For example, someone might start to take drugs for fun but they might continue to use them because they are bored, unhappy, depressed or they don't have many other ways of having fun in their life. So their reasons for continuing to take drugs may be both because it's fun, but also because they have some other difficulties that the drugs compensate for.

It may be helpful to list as many reasons as they can think of, as this will help to reveal what they are getting from the drug use. This could then help them work out what needs they might have to meet in other ways if they are to give up or cut down using drugs. It might also help them to identify other issues in

their lives which they might need support to deal with. These issues may become especially difficult to cope with while they are reducing or stopping their drug use because they won't have the positive effects of the drugs to help them get by and in many cases they may also have unpleasant withdrawal symptoms to cope with.

What are their reasons for stopping/cutting down at this time?

For some users a particular crisis is what propels them to consider changing their drug use, for others it may be that they find themselves with no other option, perhaps because there is difficulty in getting a supply of drugs. This can be a positive trigger to change, but it's important to remember that all of us have to be very motivated to maintain changed behaviour. Think about the dieting or stopping smoking examples again. For many people it takes a tremendous effort not to fall back into old bad eating habits or having the odd cigarette.

The danger for all of us is that if we haven't fully prepared ourselves for the struggle, it can become a vicious circle of trying, giving in and then feeling hopeless about trying again because we think we're doomed to failure. We are much more likely to succeed if we have fully prepared ourselves for the process and made plans for how we are going to cope and where we can get support.

If your user is considering cutting down rather than stopping, they will need to think especially carefully about how they're going to achieve and maintain this, because it is often easier, in the long run, to cut something out altogether than to try and be controlled about using it - even if this is harder to achieve in the short term. If the drug(s) they are using have very uncomfortable withdrawal symptoms, they may face having to go through withdrawal each time they cut down more, rather than going through it all at once, even if this is very painful and difficult. How they tackle the change in their behaviour must, however, be their choice wherever possible, as this will make it more likely to succeed.

It may be helpful to list the pros and cons of stopping or changing their drug use – both in the short and longer term to see what incentives there might be for changing their behaviour. Having a full picture of both the short and long term pros and cons of giving up or cutting down, will help them to more fully prepare themselves for everything they might have to face.

Many users may also have fixed ideas on what help they need to start changing their behaviour, but what they are hoping for may not be available, so it is especially important that they have a realistic picture of what is on

offer and how they might cope if the support they feel they need will not be available. For example, some medicines can sometimes be prescribed to help a user cope with withdrawal symptoms, but not always. Some people can be hospitalised while they go through withdrawal, but many others may have to face withdrawal out in the community.

Withdrawal/Detoxing

Depending on the extent of a person's drug use, they may face some tough obstacles in trying to change their drug use and maintain the changes. Unless a person has only been using drugs occasionally, they may experience a lot of unpleasant physical and emotional symptoms as their body learns to do without the presence of drugs (or adjusts to the presence of less drugs) in the system. Depending on which drugs they're using, and how much, they may experience some or all of the following:

<i>extreme tiredness</i>	<i>desire for sleep but not being able to</i>
<i>fever</i>	<i>shaking</i>
<i>depression</i>	<i>severe aches and pains</i>
<i>hallucinations</i>	<i>nausea</i>
<i>panic attacks</i>	<i>phobias</i>
<i>heavy sweating</i>	<i>no appetite or huge appetite</i>
<i>severe flu-like symptoms</i>	<i>paranoia</i>
<i>diarrhoea</i>	<i>extreme mood swings</i>
<i>loss of/increased interest in sex</i>	<i>itching or scratching</i>

Different drugs will cause withdrawal symptoms for different periods of time. Physical withdrawal symptoms will generally disappear after two weeks, with the most severe symptoms fading after the first four to six days. In the case of withdrawal from methadone (prescribed as a heroin substitute) however, this can take longer because it is a long acting drug. The emotional symptoms may last for much longer however.

Many users may have heard horrendous stories about withdrawal, so it can be helpful for them to be properly prepared about what is to come. It could, therefore, be very useful for your partner to talk with a drug worker about what to expect and to consider what can be put in place to help them cope with the symptoms of withdrawing before they start the process. (This is especially important for users of certain drugs like barbiturates, or heavy alcohol use, because withdrawal in certain cases can be dangerous.) Some drugs will cause a lot of physical discomfort, whereas with other drugs, it is the emotional symptoms that make it more difficult for a user to persevere.

Whether your partner suffers unpleasant physical withdrawal symptoms or not, they may still struggle to deal with the psychological impact of not using/using less drugs. Just as we may have got used to having certain things in our lives, it may only be when we try to do without those things that we realise how much we have come to depend on them as part of our every day life. The same may be so for your partner, in that they may stop using drugs relatively easily, but find it very difficult to stay stopped.

The following suggestions may be helpful if your partner is withdrawing from a drug which causes a lot of physical symptoms:

- Can a room be made available where they can have peace and quiet?
- Are there magazines/TV programmes/ music or other things that they can get involved with, especially if they're unable to sleep?
- Can you, or someone else, be available for company if they're feeling desperate?
- Are there any foods you can stock up on that might tempt them to eat especially if they're not feeling at all hungry?
- Painkillers may not make any difference to how they're feeling and it may be inadvisable to encourage them to take any medicines. Advice about this should be sought from a drugs worker or doctor. Some people find having a hot water bottle helps ease stomach pains.
- There may be some herbal remedies and complimentary therapies including detox teas and acupuncture which could help with the process of withdrawal. A drug worker may be able to make some suggestions or refer your partner to someone who can provide such treatments.
- Their sleep patterns may be very disturbed so let them set their own timetable for when they do anything, they may not be able to do much at all. If they do get to sleep try to let them do so.
- They may have no energy to talk with you and be very bad tempered or upset. If they do need to talk, listening rather than making suggestions about what they can do will be the most helpful thing you can do at this time. Try to reassure them that the painful feelings will pass.
- Their body temperature may fluctuate so they may need the heating up high or not on at all

If you work, it could be helpful (for both of you) for you to have some time off as it's likely that you may also find it difficult to get proper sleep during this time and, for them, having some company may be helpful. But do check out whether they would prefer you to be with them at all times, or just be nearby in case.

Staying off/Maintaining reduced drug use

The first couple of weeks after stopping or cutting down will be hard in themselves, but your partner may still struggle after this time, as they may suddenly have long periods of time to fill which previously would have been taken up with obtaining or using drugs. It may also be a time when being around friends who are users or in places they associate with using drugs will be a problem, as the temptation to use again could be very strong. This could mean that they feel very isolated and lonely. Helping your partner to think of other things to do with their time may, therefore, prove useful. (If someone has been using drugs for a long time they may have forgotten how to enjoy anything without drugs.) Don't underestimate how difficult it will be for them to maintain a changed lifestyle, as that changed lifestyle could seem very empty at first.

Michael spoke to Adfam about trying to help his girlfriend give up drugs:

"We got through the first week and I had to go back to work. Sarah was on her own all day again and it just got too much for her. The next time around, after realising the full implications of what drug dependency meant, we worked out in advance what sort of things she could do while she was on her own to pass the time. We planned to do things like bowling rather than being stuck at home or in a pub where she might be tempted to get drunk instead of drugged."

Your partner might like to think about using this time to do some training or volunteering to gain some skills or find out about housing etc. Local drug services or volunteer bureaux could provide information on these issues. Job centres and local community centres also often have information on training courses. If a person has been using drugs heavily however, it may be a while before they will be well enough to participate like this.

What happens if they relapse

Although it might be hard not to lose heart and feel like everything is lost, many people try to stop several times before finally succeeding. Remember, each time they try again, they usually have a little more resolve to succeed and will usually have learnt some lessons about what they need to work on

to make success more likely the next time around. In the meantime, you could encourage your partner to consider the following steps until they are ready to try again:

- not taking the same amounts as before - this is very important for people using drugs such as heroin and methadone as their tolerance for the drug may have dropped and so there is an increased risk of them accidentally overdosing
- reducing or stopping injecting drugs and trying a safer method of use or injecting more safely
- avoiding using dangerous combinations of drugs like heroin and alcohol or alcohol and tranquilisers on the same day
- cutting down their use
- spending time looking at the reasons they didn't succeed this time
- resolving to try and sort out other difficulties in their lives.

Your partner may feel angry at themselves and guilty for failing. This could lead them into further and heavier drug use, even if they don't show such feelings. It could be especially helpful at this time, to encourage your partner to get on with looking at how to make their next attempt successful instead of focussing on their current failure. You may understandably feel angry and disappointed at this time and there might come a time when you are no longer able to cope with continuing to support your partner, but do remember that there are services out there that can help you.

5. And Finally...

The information in this booklet is based largely on the experiences of many people whom have contacted Adfam over the years. In the same way that many of these people have found a way forward in their lives it is possible for you to do so as well - however bleak things may appear at the moment. By picking up this booklet you have shown that you care about the person close to you using drugs and we hope that this booklet has contained some practical ideas on how to support the drug user close to you. As well as caring for them it is as important to remember to care for yourself both physically and emotionally as it is only by looking after yourself that you will have the strength to cope with and support somebody else. Remember, you do not have to cope alone as there are support services to help both you and your partner and the next section provides information on the various sources of help available.

If you have any comments on the information contained in this booklet or have suggestions for inclusion in further editions please do let us know either by phone, fax or email – all our contact details are on the outside cover of the booklet.

6. Useful Organisations

Action for Prisoners' Families – a UK umbrella organisation Tel 020 7384 1987 Web site: www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk

Alcohol Concern – for information on local alcohol support services. Tel: 020 7928 7377 (9.30am-5.30pm Mon-Fri) Web site: www.alcoholconcern.org.uk

Blenheim Project – local drug service which produces a range of leaflets Tel: 020 8960 5599 Web site: www.theblenheimproject.org

British Association for Counselling - provides information on general counselling services (or ask your GP). Tel: 0870 443 5252 (24 Hours) Web site: www.bacp.co.uk

Cocaine Anonymous – has meetings and a helpline for cocaine users. Tel: 020 7248 1123 Web site: www.cauk.org.uk

Drugscope – drug information, research and publications. Tel: 020 7928 1211 (Open office hours) Web site: www.drugscope.org.uk

Families Anonymous – 12-Step Self Help Support groups for families of drug users. Tel: 020 7498 4680 for details of local meetings (Open Mon-Fri 1pm-4pm) Helpline: 0845 1200 660 Web site: www.famanon.org.uk

Gingerbread – offers a phone advice service for lone parents. Provides support for lone parents and their children through local self-help groups. Helpline: 0800 018 4318 (Office Hrs) Web site: www.gingerbread.org.uk

Homestart UK – provides information and practical support to families with children under 5 and details of local services. Tel: 0116 233 9955 Web site: www.homestart.org.uk

Institute for Complimentary Medicine – Tel: 020 7237 5165 (Open office hours) Web site: www.icmedicine.co.uk

London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard - National 24 hour support service for gay men and lesbians. Also provides details of local support services. Tel: 020 7837 7324 (24 Hours) Web site: www.llgs.org.uk

Lone Parent Helpline – runs an information service for lone parents Tel: 0800 018 5026 Web site: www.oneparentfamilies.org.uk

MIND Information Line – provides a service for people with mental health problems and their carers. Also for those who use tranquillisers and/or anti-depressants. Tel: 020 8519 2122 Web site: www.mind.org.uk

Narcotics Anonymous – offers a helpline for drug addicts. Also offers self-help meetings around the country which operate like Alcoholics Anonymous. Tel 020 7730 0009 (10am-10pm, 7 days) Web site: www.ukna.org

National Aids Helpline – offers help to anyone concerned about HIV/AIDS. Tel: 0800 567 123 (Open 24 hours) Web site: www.nat.org.uk

National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders – runs a helpline offering information and help for ex-offenders. Tel: 0800 0181259 (Open office hours) Web site: www.nacro.org.uk

National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux – Offices nationwide providing free, impartial and confidential advice and help. Tel: 020 7833 2181 (Open office hours) Web site: www.citizensadvice.org.uk

National Debtline –helpline offering information and advice on debt. Tel: 0808 808 4000 (Open 9am-9pm, Mon – Fri) Web site: www.nationaldebtline.co.uk

National Drugs Helpline – Helpline for anyone concerned about drug misuse. Provides information about drugs and referrals to local services. Tel: 0800 77 66 00 (Open 24 hours) Web site: www.ndh.org.uk

National Family Mediation - can provide information on local mediation services for families around family break up, divorce and separation. Tel: 020 7485 8809 (Open office hours) Web site: www.nfm.u-net.com

Parentline – runs a 24 helpline for anybody looking after a child. Tel 0808 8002222 Website: www.parentlineplus.org.uk

Relate – provides counselling for those having problems in their relationships. Tel: 0845 130 4010 (Open 9.30am-4.30pm, Mon – Fri) Web site: www.relate.org.uk

Rights of Women – can provide free legal advice by telephone for women about their rights. Tel: 020 7251 6577 (Opening times vary but open Tues-Thurs) Web site: www.row.org.uk

Saneline – a helpline for people coping with mental illness and provides information about local support services. Tel: 0845 767 8000 (Open midday-2am daily) Web site: www.sane.org.uk

Shelter – runs a helpline offering practical advice on housing issues. Tel: 0808 800 4444 (Open 24hours) Web site: www.shelter.org.uk

Terrence Higgins Trust – runs a helpline and other services for people affected by HIV/AIDS or anyone concerned about HIV/AIDS. Tel: 0845 1221 200 (10am-10pm, Mon-Fri; 12pm-6pm weekends) Web site: www.tht.org.uk

Womens Aid Helpline – runs a helpline for women experiencing physical, emotional or sexual violence in the home. Tel: 0845 7023 468 (Open 24 hours) Web site: www.womensaid.org.uk

Adfam is the national umbrella organisation working to improve the quality of life for families affected by drug and alcohol use

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