



L A K E F R O N T
W E L L N E S S C E N T E R , S . C .

161 West Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 2B Pewaukee, WI 53072
Phone 262-695-8857 www.lakefrontwellness.com

Abundant Living... Discover the Possibilities!

SUBSTANCE ABUSE RECOVERY

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)	www.alcoholics-anonymous.org
Narcotics Anonymous (NA)	www.na.org
Recovering Couples Anonymous (RCA)	www.recovering-couples.org
National Association for Children of Alcoholics	www.nacoa.org
Marijuana: Facts for Teens	www.nida.nih.gov/MarijBroch/Marijteens.html
Marijuana: Facts Parents Need to Know	www.nida.nih.gov/MarijBroch/MarijparentsN.html
Parents – The Anti-Drug	www.theantidrug.com
Partnership for a Drug-Free America	www.drugfreeamerica.org
Talking with Kids about Tough Issues	www.talkingwithkids.org
Teen Drug Use and Abuse Prevention	www.parentingteens.com
Tips 4 Youth	www.cdc.gov/tobacco/tips4youth.htm

Substance Abuse and Intimate Relationships

It has long been known that marriage (or other long-term, committed relationships) and substance abuse don't mix. Having a partner who drinks too much or uses drugs is very much like throwing a stone into a still pond: the effects ripple out and influences all that is near. In the case of a partner who uses drugs or drinks too much, the effect is felt by his or her children, relatives, friends, and co-workers. However, many would argue that, aside from the abuser, the greatest price is often paid by the abuser's partner.

What are the costs? Couples in which a partner abuses drugs or alcohol are often very unhappy; in fact, these partners are often more unhappy than couples who don't have problems with alcohol or other drugs, but who seek help for marital problems. As drinking or drug use gets worse, it starts to take more and more time away from the couple, taking its toll by creating an emotional distance between the partners that is difficult to overcome. These couples also report that they fight and argue a great deal, which sometimes can become violent. It is often the fighting itself that can create an environment or situation in which the partner with the drinking or drug problems uses these substances to reduce his or her stress. When the substance use eventually becomes one of the main reasons for fighting or arguing, what we see happen is a vicious cycle, in which substance use causes conflict, the conflict leads to more substance use as a way of reducing tension, conflict about the substance use escalates, more drinking or drug use occurs, and so on. Couples in which a partner abuses drugs or alcohol have a very difficult time getting out of this downward spiral; fortunately, we also know of proven ways to help these relationships and, in the process, help the substance abuser recover. So, if you or your partner is having a problem with alcohol or other drugs, there is hope.



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When Drinking or Drug Use is Harming the Relationship

There are several tell-tale signs that drinking or drug use by a partner is causing harm to the relationship to the point that help from a treatment professional may be needed. The following are some of the common danger signals often seen in couples in which a partner has a substance use problem:

- Many arguments about drinking or drugs use or things related to drinking or drug use, such as money problems, staying out late, not taking care of responsibilities in the home, and so forth
 - On different occasions, having to "cover" for a partner who has been drinking or using drugs too much by making excuses for him or her, such as reporting to a boss or co-worker that the substance user is "sick" and won't be at work as a result
 - A partner reporting that he or she drinks or uses drugs to reduce tension or stress related to arguments and fights in the home about alcohol or other drugs
 - Drinking and drug use is the only or one of the few things the partners like to do together
 - Episodes of domestic violence, or "angry touching" by either partner when a partner has been drinking or using drugs
- Finding that one or both partners need to be drunk or high to show signs of affection or to talk about the problems in their relationship
The relationship or family as a whole becomes isolated from friends and relatives to hide the drinking or drug problem

Although most couples will not show all of these danger signs, if even one of these is present in your marriage or relationship, it indicates that it may be time for you to "take stock" of the relationship and think about making it better. That is likely to mean that drinking and drug use will need to stop and the problems in the relationship will need to be identified and addressed. If you or your partner are showing signs of having a problem with drugs or alcohol and there are problems in the relationship, it is common to hope these things will take care of themselves over time. Unfortunately, that rarely happens. The better thing to do is to get treatment as soon as possible, or at least call and ask about treatments that may be available to you. If you don't, the problems are very likely to get worse.

Can Treatment Help?

There are many different treatments available that can be effective in reducing or eliminating problems with alcohol or other drugs. Some treatments involve individual counseling, others involve group counseling, and still others involve self-help meetings and support groups like Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotic Anonymous. So, if you have a problem with drinking or drug use, it is worth it to enter treatment, not only for you, but also for your partner, children, friends, and others. If your partner has a problem with drugs or alcohol, getting him or her to enter treatment may be one of the best things you can do for him and your relationship.

But what if your partner has a drinking or drug problem, but does not want to go to treatment or seek help, because he or she does not think there is a problem or because he or she does not want to be involved in counseling? This is a very common problem. It turns out that alcohol and drug abuse treatment programs have help for concerned family members and work with this very issue. They can give you ideas and information on motivating your partner to consider getting help; these approaches are often very helpful in getting family members who are reluctant to seek help to ultimately enter treatment.



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But What About Our Relationship?

Many treatments for individuals who have a problem with alcohol and other drugs will include the partner in some way. Research has shown that involving partners in the treatment at some point can be very important in helping the treatment succeed. It is also very important that the problems in the relationship be treated; these problems do not go away because the drinking or drug use has stopped. Many couples are both surprised and disappointed that they continue to have many fights and arguments after the substance abuse has stopped.

The important point here is substance abuse by a partner causes damage to the marriage or relationship and these problems need to be treated, too. If the issues in the relationship are not treated, they can set the stage for continued conflict and, in turn, relapse to drinking or drug use. Thus, lasting recovery from substance use depends, in part, on making the relationship better. Eliminating drinking or drug use is only the starting point; once sobriety is attained, a supportive caring relationship can be one of the strongest factors in making that sobriety last.

Books

Alcoholics Anonymous (3rd edition). Alcoholics Anonymous World Services (1976).

Another Chance: Hope and Help for the Alcoholic Family (2nd edition). By Sharon Wegscheider-Cruse. Science and Behavior Books (1989).

Facing Shame: Families in Recovery. By Merle E. Fossum & Marilyn J. Mason, W. W. Norton (1986).

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