



Guide for Supporters of People With Opioid Use Disorder



Being close to someone who is using opioids such as heroin can be a challenging experience to navigate. Most likely they are suffering from a health condition called Opioid Use Disorder (OUD). This disorder affects their brain structure, reducing their ability to stop themselves from using opioids. It's normal to worry about their safety and to want to help them get better, but it's important to remember that people with OUD can only begin recovery on their own terms.

Understanding Their Behavior

Their opioid use may be challenging to understand, but it's not a reflection of how much they care for you.

- Most people living with OUD are aware that their opioid use hurts the people around them, but they can't physically control their urges.
- Over time, using opioids changes how the brain functions and causes cravings that spiral beyond their control.
- With OUD, it becomes less about wanting to use and more about needing to use just to feel normal.

Remember: Stigma surrounding opioid use can prevent those with OUD from sharing their experience with a loved one and seeking treatment. So it's important to remain nonjudgmental and open to listening to what they are going through.

What to Expect If You Find Out a Loved One Has Been Using Opioids Regularly:

- **You may search for a reason**

When you start noticing changes in your loved one, it's common to search for the underlying reason. You may begin to think about why and how it may have happened or even confront your loved one directly about it. Know that OUD can happen to anyone, it does not discriminate between race, gender, age, or location.

- **You may be in denial**

It can be hard to come to terms with the possibility of an OUD in someone you care for. Loved ones may initially deny the possibility and then later experience feelings of sadness, guilt for not recognizing sooner, or frustration with themselves or their loved one. Know you are not alone.

- **It's important to accept the situation**

There comes a time when you must accept that opioid use is the cause of the changes you observe. Acceptance is a critical part of the process, and you may want to provide guidance to help your loved one to enter recovery as soon as possible, but recovery can only come when it's their choice.



What Are Your Best Next Steps?

- **Learn all you can**

Educating yourself about OUD and available resources is the best way forward once you know your loved one is using opioids. Learning about how opioid use affects the brain and body can create understanding and help to distinguish the difference between behaviors related to opioid use and your loved one themselves. You should also learn about different treatment options such as Medication-Assisted Recovery, which includes medications that will support your loved one when they choose to stop, reducing cravings and withdrawal symptoms. Learn more at RethinkRecoveryLL.com.

- **Set boundaries**

Set boundaries, and stand by them. OUD is ultimately a condition that the individual must learn to manage. No one can take the fight on for them.

- **Get support for yourself**

Watching a loved one experience OUD can have profound effects on supporters, and it's critical to take care of yourself. Talking to a therapist who specializes in this area can help. Loved ones of those with OUD need support too.

- **Be supportive**

Let them know you care about them and will emotionally support them through this process. Be there to listen and talk to your loved one through stressful situations.

- **Find resources**

Encourage the individual to seek help. This may include finding treatment resources for them. Research the different treatment options, and share them with your loved one. To find out more about treatments, such as Medication-Assisted Recovery, and a list of specialists in your local area, visit RethinkRecoveryLL.com.

Common Boundaries That Supporters Set

You can choose the boundaries that make sense for you and your family, but here are some to consider:

- Not spending time with them when they have been using
- Not giving them any money
- Not providing housing or transportation if they are still using
- Not paying to bail them out of jail or for legal fees if they are arrested
- Not covering for them if you have trouble with a job, school, probation officer, friend, or anyone else
- Not being around them if they insult or threaten you
- If they can't be on time for plans or an event, they are no longer welcome until their behavior changes.

You can also define what you are willing to do: I am here whenever you need to talk. I am happy to drive you to treatment. I am happy to research specialists to help you. I am happy to cook for you once a week.

Treatment and Recovery

People do recover from OUD, but it's important they receive the right treatment and medications. Medication-Assisted Recovery is a type of treatment for OUD in which medications and optional behavioral counseling are used to bring recovery within reach. The medications work to reduce cravings and help with withdrawal symptoms. For more details, visit RethinkRecoveryIL.com.



For more information and resources about how
Medication-Assisted Recovery works, visit RethinkRecoveryIL.com.

