

Suggested Guidelines for Living with an Alcoholic

Combating alcoholism and its destruction requires your greatest efforts, for your action and attitudes can either perpetuate the alcoholic's disease, or make recovery possible. Below are a few suggestions to begin your **own** recovery and possibly the alcoholic's as well.

1. You no longer have to feel alone. Start coming to Al-Anon meetings regularly, where you will find help, guidance and understanding. Your own way of thinking can sometimes deceive you. Having an inadequate knowledge of the disease of alcoholism can create confusion, despair and anxiety. Sharing experiences with other Al-Anon members who have a common problem widens one's understanding and opens new and better ways to deal with difficulties.
2. You no longer have to hide the fact that you are seeking help; begin by letting the alcoholic know that you are. Seek out all the resources open to you; help is available from the family members of recovering alcoholics, open meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous, sympathetic doctors, clergymen, social workers and clinics. Start now to understand and plan for recovery, both for you and the alcoholic. To do nothing is the worst choice you can make.
3. You no longer have to deny the excessive drinking; accept the alcoholic as a sick person in need of help. The drinking is compulsive and cannot be controlled through willpower alone. Accept that alcoholism is a progressive illness and that the situation is likely to get worse as long as the drinking continues.
4. **You did not cause** the alcoholic's drinking therefore you no longer have to be concerned with the many reasons for it. You no longer have to blame yourself or search for causes. Alcoholics drink because they have the physical, emotional and spiritual disease of alcoholism. Start focusing on your own actions and shortcomings.
5. **You cannot control** the alcoholic's drinking. You no longer have to obsess about the alcoholic and their behaviour. In your anxiety you may feel compelled to do for the alcoholic what they should do for themselves, but this enabling behaviour may prolong the situation. Covering up for the alcoholic or trying to abort the consequences of their drinking may reduce the crisis but it also perpetuates the problem.
6. **You cannot cure** the alcoholic's drinking. If their drinking is causing problems, they can be made aware of it and be held accountable. You no longer have to make idle threats; don't threaten unless you intend to carry it out. Idle threats only make them desperate or angry and make them think that you don't mean what you say. If you do need to carry out a previously made threat, be sure to think it through carefully and understand the implications in it for you and the alcoholic. Sometimes threats made in the heat of the moment intended to hurt or punish only serve to hurt you in the end.
7. You no longer have to blame the alcoholic for all your problems. You no longer have to be a martyr or filled with self-righteousness. You no longer need to make emotional appeals, e.g. "If you love me..." It is possible to have these attitudes without saying a word. Try to develop an attitude in keeping with the facts that you have learned about alcoholism. This will enable you to have compassion for the alcoholic. As you recover you can begin to understand and encourage the alcoholic.
8. You no longer have to let the alcoholic's thinking, feelings and behaviour determine your own thinking, feelings and behaviour.

9. You no longer have to remain the passive victim of someone else's illness. Ask for help and take your life back. You can detach from the situation by mentally refusing to internalise the words, criticisms and pain of the alcoholic. You can create physical, emotional or spiritual distance between you by detaching when you have had enough.
10. You no longer have to lecture, nag, coax, or reason with the alcoholic when they are drunk or sober. It may make you feel better initially but it will make the situation worse. By avoiding the above, you can effectively remove yourself from the alcoholic's blame or guilt. Start by reporting their inappropriate actions to them when they are sober by saying what you mean, and don't be mean when you say it!
11. You no longer have to engage in angry arguments which satisfy the alcoholic's craving for punishment in order to relieve their guilt; instead you can deal with your day by day difficulties with quiet poise and serenity, remembering always that you are doing this for your own benefit.
12. You no longer have to accept or extract promises, or switch agreements. Alcoholics often make promises and agreements as a method of postponing pain. Start rejecting them. When you try to reason with or demand certain behaviour of the alcoholic you only increase their need to lie, or force them to make promises they cannot possibly keep.
13. You no longer have to let the alcoholic lie, outsmart or exploit you as it encourages the process of avoiding responsibility and teaches them to lose respect for you. If you realise that this is happening, stop the conversation. Let them know that you know they're trying to have you on. The truth can be painful but it is better to face reality.
14. You no longer need to buy, hide, search for or pour alcohol down the sink. You are only inviting the alcoholic to find ways of getting more. Besides it is a total waste of time and money. You no longer need to drink with the alcoholic to try and control their intake, or gain their cooperation. This will only condone the actions you condemn. Nothing will make them drink more or less than the illness dictates.
15. You no longer have to rescue the alcoholic; stop all enabling and start letting them suffer and assume responsibility for each and every consequence of their drinking.
16. You no longer need to feel helpless about the alcoholic assaulting you and your children. Start protecting yourselves; find a place of refuge where you can stay until it is safe to return home.
17. You and your children no longer need to travel in a motor vehicle with a driver who has been drinking. Use your own transport and drive yourself and your children, or ask for a lift from a friend; you are responsible to protect them from danger.
18. You no longer have to follow other people's advice but rather decide what is right for you according to your own value system and circumstances. Close family and friends may be prejudiced and leave you feeling confused, angry or hurt with their input. Those who understand alcoholism can best help you discover answers to the many questions you have, in your own time, and in your own way.
19. You do not have to follow any of the suggestions on this page. This sheet is simply a guide to be used with intelligence and evaluation and adapted to your own *very individual and personal circumstances*.