

Frequently Asked Questions

Will I ever be able to trust my loved one again?

Lost trust is a common issue for family and friends of recovering individuals. We experience disappointment, hurt, frustration and anger from our loved one's behavior. The consistently unreliable and untruthful communication that accompanies using alcohol and drugs takes an enormous toll on families' trust, and it can take a long time to heal.

Early recovery restores hope but hope and trust are not the same thing. It is important to accept that while we want to trust our loved one's commitment to recovery, not every recovery attempt will be successful. And, while the using may have stopped, some old behaviors may linger. Rebuilding trust is not easy. You have probably trusted your loved one long after he has shown he is not trustworthy, so it will probably take a while to rebuild trust. It is reasonable, even necessary, to take the time needed to trust again.

It may be helpful to think of trust as a bank account. We are each responsible for our own account. Each thoughtful act, each time we keep a promise, and follow through on commitments, we make a deposit in our trust account. Likewise, each broken promise, hurtful comment or action, lie, or manipulation is a withdrawal from the account. Your loved one may have been making small deposits over the years, but during times of active use, withdrawals far outweighed deposits. Now the account is overdrawn. Trust is gone, but not forever. Over time, with frequent deposits and few or no withdrawals, a positive balance can be restored. You cannot make deposits on behalf of your loved one; she must do that for herself. Like recovering from bankruptcy, it can take years to restore the trust account.



Many family members find it helpful to look for deposits into the account, acknowledge those times to the recovering person, and re-visit the issue of trust when they are ready. In this way your loved one has a chance to show she is trustworthy while the family has time to "wait and see."

Can my loved one drink alcoholic beverages? He did not have a problem with alcohol in the past.

Probably not. Consuming alcohol is an extremely risky behavior for anyone in recovery, regardless of their primary drug in the past. Alcohol disrupts the dopamine pathways in the brain, just as heroin and other drugs, and it has a similar effect on brain functioning.

Many people in early recovery do not understand that alcohol is as dangerous and toxic as any other drug. Even though it is legal and socially acceptable in our culture, it can have devastating effects on the newly recovering person. It can be difficult for young adults to accept that this is true, because so many of their peers are drinking, but the recovering person cannot safely drink. It is fairly common to become addicted to alcohol or return to using their previous drug of choice when they begin to drink alcohol in early recovery.

What about having alcohol in my home with the recovering person living there? I like to have a drink every now and then.

This is a personal decision with no clear right or wrong answer. Remember that alcohol is found everywhere – television commercials, billboards, seeing a bar as you walk down the street. If you avoid having alcohol in your home because you are trying to “prevent” your loved one from drinking, that is not possible. Don’t feel you have to rearrange your home and life around the recovering loved one. However, some families feel that having drugs or alcohol in the living space of a newly sober person is uncomfortable for everyone, and out of consideration and to show support for their loved one, they choose not to have alcohol in their home.

How can I forgive my loved one for things he did when he was using?

Forgiveness is a process, like other kinds of behavior change. It starts with a conscious choice to change our thinking about our loved one and her actions. Consider what you have to gain by hanging on to your anger, resentments and pain from the past. These feelings can quickly become toxic and harmful to the recovering person, and also to you.

Begin by accepting what is, and the past is the past. Acceptance is not the same as approval; it does not mean you like the situation or are willing to continue allowing it to be part of your life. It means accepting the reality of the situation, no matter how difficult. Once you stop fighting what is, you are better able to move forward in a positive way.



Forgiveness is not the same as trust. Forgiving does not mean forgetting. We can forgive the person, but we do well to remember the behavior. Forgiveness means giving up a wish to have a different past. Forgiveness is the act of letting go of anger and resentment; when we do that, the past becomes one event in our lives and does not define who we are. Forgiveness is an act of understanding that none of us is perfect, and all have made mistakes. Forgiveness is remembering that the actions of an individual in the state of active using are those of a sick person.

You can begin small – forgiving in situations with fellow drivers on your morning commute, inconsiderate coworkers and unfriendly neighbors. Then allow yourself to extend that forgiveness to more personal situations. Over time you may feel less anger and more compassion for your loved one.

Should I forbid my loved one from seeing his former friends who still use drugs? How much should I supervise her activities?

This is a good example of trying to control what is out of your control. Unless you are prepared to lock your loved on in your home and watch her 24/7 – and even by doing that – you cannot realistically insure that your loved one does not return to old friends. Our desire to monitor what our recovering loved one does come from our fear and anxiety about them returning to active use.

The responsibility for maintaining recovery belongs to the individual, not his family, and he must choose who will be supportive of his recovery and who will not. You can encourage him to seek out others who are serious about recovery, and discuss your concerns about his actions, but you cannot force anyone to do anything. When you start worrying or trying to control a situation such as this, stop yourself, remind yourself that you cannot control this, and that trying to do so will likely have the opposite result of what you intend. Remember what you have learned about open communication and call on your support people to help you stay focused on the only thing you can control – your reactions.

Other members of my family do not understand why I am setting boundaries; they say I am heartless and cruel. How can I get them to understand and support me?



People who have not experienced what you have, or don't know about the importance of boundaries, or aren't educated about the disease of SUD may not understand and support you. Remember that they are doing what they think is right for them, and so are you. After you have told them what you have learned about boundaries, and you feel confident in the path you are taking, it may be time to let go and focus on your own needs. Should they continue to criticize you and be negative towards you, limit or end your contact with them, at least for a short period of time. They may come to understand and support your decision in the future – if not, you can

be sure that you'll become healthier.

It seems selfish for me to focus on myself instead of my loved one. Why should I do that?

You may feel uncomfortable meeting your own needs after you've been used to focusing all your energy on your loved one. It is not selfish to make your own life a priority now, and it is vital to your own recovery. Identify things that you enjoy doing, people who bring positive experiences to your life and spend your time doing these things and seeing these people. You will be amazed at how much easier it is to interact with your loved one when you take care of yourself.

When recovering individuals see their family members taking care of themselves, becoming healthy and less stressed, they may feel unsettled (you are changing the status quo) and push back. Stay the course and they will probably see your improvements, and choose to take care of themselves as well.