Living with a heavy drinker

Stockton Treatment Alcohol and Recovery Service
When does drinking become heavy drinking?

This guide has been produced to support people living with a heavy drinker. It offers practical advice and ways of coping. It also contains contact details for you to get in touch with your local service. Our details are on the back page. Your Doctor is also a good place to get help.

Although those close to a heavy drinker might see their drinking as a problem the drinker may not see it this way.

These are some of the signs that someone is drinking too much:

- their drinking affects their relationships with family and friends and their work
- alcohol is their number one priority, everything is planned to fit in with drinking
- hiding alcohol and drinking or lying about how much they have drunk
- a very strong need to drink and finding it hard to stop once they start
- shaking, sweating, feeling sick or vomiting before their first drink of the day that then stops after a drink
WARNING:
Shaking, sweating, feeling sick or vomiting before a first drink of the day that then stops after a drink can mean that someone is dependent on alcohol.

It is important that if someone is dependent on alcohol then they should NOT stop drinking. This may cause them harm and could be fatal.

If you think that you or someone you know needs help with their drinking then we are here to help at Stockton Treatment Alcohol and Recovery Service. Call in or phone us, our contact details are on the back page.

Having a heavy drinker in the family can create problems for the whole family

Someone may be drinking heavily to deal with stress, but drinking usually makes the situation worse. It’s a vicious circle.

A mood of a heavy drinker may change quickly which can lead to tension and uncertainty within the family.

Communication and relationships in the family often become difficult as everything revolves around the drinking. It can become the only thing that the family thinks and talks about which can lead to arguments and sometimes violence.

Practical difficulties may include the drinker having accidents as well as money, health, sex and legal problems.

The drinker may no longer take responsibility for things, this might be jobs around the house. Other family members may then have to do these jobs which can lead to resentment.

The family can feel ashamed of the drinker’s behaviour and become cut off from other people.
Heavy drinking and children

It is common to hide heavy drinking in families from children. But children usually understand more about what is going on than their parents or carers realise. This might come out in the way that they behave at home or school.

The heavy drinker may not be able to look after their children leaving the other parent feeling that they are coping alone. The drinker may also lose the respect of their children as the children grow up.

If heavy drinking is affecting children then all options should be considered. The welfare of any children involved is the priority so you may need to think hard about continuing your relationship.
How you can help

It is important to remember that you cannot make someone stop drinking but they can be encouraged to cut down or stop and you can help them to make changes. Some people have found the following ideas helpful.

Talk
Talk to the person you are worried about. Find a time when you are both sober and you are both calm.

Listen
Tell them about the problems their drinking is causing. But remember, it is important to listen to them too. Find out how they feel about their drinking and how it helps them.

Try to avoid arguing
Try to avoid getting into arguments with the person who is drinking. Although this is difficult, arguing will make it more difficult for them to talk openly to you about things in the future.

Seek help
Find out what help is available, both for the person drinking and for yourself and your family. Remember that it may take time before someone is ready to get help with their drinking. When they feel they are ready your local alcohol service is there to help.

Set boundaries
Make clear what behaviour you will not accept and what you will do if it still happens. Do not make threats that you will not or cannot keep.

Talk with other members of the family about what you are trying to do. This will make it easier for everyone to support you and do the same.

Be realistic
Help the person who is drinking to be realistic. Do not encourage them to make promises they cannot keep. – “I’ll never drink again” is a very difficult promise to keep.

Do not make it easy for them to drink
Do not make it easy for them to drink by buying it for them, or always agreeing to go to the pub. It may be difficult to break these patterns, but they are more likely to take you seriously if your actions match what you’re saying.

Do not cover for them
Do not try to hide the effects of their drinking. Seeing the consequences might encourage them to change. Do not try to hide the effects from other people, e.g. phoning work with excuses, missing social events for fear of embarrassment.

Do not accept a label
Encourage the person to concentrate on the effects the drinking is having on their life rather than them accepting a label such as ‘I am just an alcoholic’.

Do not make excuses
Sometimes both the drinker and their family blame other things for an alcohol problem such as: losing a job, their current job is too stressful or living in an area with lots of pubs. This means that hope is pinned on a new job or move to a new area to solve the alcohol problem but this often fails to sort out the issue.
What you can do

Get help for yourself
Being involved with a heavy drinker can be very difficult and you may need to get help for yourself even if the drinker in your life is not yet ready to change. Local services can help you with this. Some service details are included on the back cover.

Remember – you are not alone
Heavy drinking is a common problem and lots of people will understand how you feel, so do not be embarrassed to talk about it.

Deal with feelings
Problem drinking may give rise to constant resentment. Professional support can help you deal with feelings of anger. It will help you keep a healthy home life. Try not to take out these feelings on others, particularly children who can be seriously affected by an unreasonable, angry parent.
Look after yourself
Living with a problem drinker can be very stressful and can take over your life. Make sure that you have time to yourself regularly to do something that you enjoy. You will feel better for it and more able to cope with the situation at home.

Set boundaries and stick to them
You need to be clear about what you are prepared to accept from the person who is drinking and how you will react if any boundaries are overstepped. This is especially important if there is a risk of violence.

Take responsibility – but do not accept blame
We are all responsible for our own behaviour so do not accept blame for someone else’s drinking. On the other hand you are responsible for your reaction to it.

Accept that you may need to change your relationship
If the problem drinking is making your, and/or your childrens’ life difficult then you could need to make changes in your relationship to protect yourselves including considering leaving.
How do I get in touch?

Open 9 – 5 Mon, Tues, Wed, Fri; and 9 – 7 Thurs at:
STARS, 3-9 Skinner Street, Stockton, TS18 1DY
Or you can call us on: 01642 625 980

Taking that first step to getting help might be difficult for you.
We understand.
We are here to help you every step of the way.

Get in touch today.
Lifeline working in partnership with Fulcrum

'Lifeline: Reducing harm, promoting recovery, challenging inequalities'

www.lifeline.org.uk

Registered Office: 12 Hilton Street, Manchester, M1 1JF
Charity Number: 515691 Company Number: 1842240