

# Table of Contents ●

Introduction	5
The Impacts of Meth and Other Drug Abuse	7
What is Substance Abuse Prevention?	11
How Can You Help a Friend or Loved One Who Is Using Drugs?	15
Addressing Drug Abuse in the Workplace	29
Responding to Drug Activity in Your Neighborhood	39
Mobilizing Against Drug Activity In Your Community	45
Communicating the Message Within Your Community	55
Resources	69
References	73

# How Can You Help a Friend or Loved One Who Is Using Drugs? ●

## **If you know someone with a substance abuse problem, you are not alone.**

Millions of Americans abuse alcohol or other drugs, and experience shows there's a ripple effect. For every person with a substance abuse problem, several more are affected.

There is tremendous hope. People affected by someone's substance abuse problem can be a powerful part of the solution. Substance abuse is no different than other serious illnesses; learning the facts, recognizing the problem and getting help are the keys to healing.

People who seek to help a friend or loved one with an alcohol or other drug problem may initially feel alone, perhaps embarrassed, and unsure about where to turn for assistance. They may face a situation in which their loved one who is addicted denies the problem or has difficulty accepting assistance. But remember that you are in a good position to help because you know the person and their way of life. And if you already have made an effort to understand the impacts of the problem, you may be in a better position to develop a supportive strategy.<sup>7</sup>

## **Getting help for someone who needs treatment**

Substance abuse treatment can include a screening and brief intervention, or long-term, more intense attention. The type of treatment depends on the severity of the problem, but the goals are the same: addressing a person's physical, psychological, emotional and social conditions; a sustained reduction in alcohol or other drug use; and sustained improvement in personal health and social function.

## **Did you know?**

In 2004, an estimated 19.1 million Americans aged 12 or older were current (past month) illicit drug users.<sup>2</sup>





Be compassionate, patient and willing to act. You can help guide the person to competent help.

### Screening and brief intervention

Treatment starts with a screening, which is a series of questions about the amount and frequency of alcohol or other drug use and the consequences it may cause. Screening can be done by many professionals, including a doctor, nurse, clinical social worker or licensed substance abuse counselor. People also can screen their own use with a self-assessment tool.

Some people may then need a brief intervention, which is usually done by a health professional. During the brief intervention, a person receives feedback on their substance use based on the screening results and are frequently asked to cut back or stop use. If they are ready to cut down, the health care professional works with them to set a goal based on lower consumption. They may also be encouraged to reflect on why they use and how their lives will change by lowering their use. People who want to stop substance use

most likely will be referred for additional evaluation or treatment.

To begin the screening and brief intervention process, you may wish to talk with your doctor or employee assistance professional about referring you to someone who can help, such as a licensed substance abuse counselor or family therapist.

### For those who need treatment

As mentioned above, treatment takes many forms – individual, group, family or multifamily group therapy. Experts believe that any number of programs can lead to success if a person addicted to alcohol or other drugs accepts help and puts energy into their own recovery. Your doctor or other health care professional, as well as an employee assistance professional, can help determine where someone should seek treatment.<sup>8</sup>

The Partnership for a Drug-Free America is a nonprofit coalition of communications, health, medical and education professionals working to reduce illicit drug use and help people live healthy, drug-free lives.



212-922-1560

[www.drugfree.org/meth](http://www.drugfree.org/meth)

## Here are some tips for helping a person with an alcohol or other drug problem.

- Remain calm, unemotional and factual when talking about their behavior and its consequences.
- Be compassionate, patient and willing to act. You can help guide the person to competent help.
- Let the person with the problem know you are reading and learning about substance abuse through Al-Anon and/or other programs and sources.
- Talk about the situation with someone you trust, such as a faith leader, counselor, friend, social worker or someone who has experienced substance abuse personally or as a family member.
- Establish and maintain a healthy home atmosphere and include the person who is abusing substances in family life.
- Educate children in the family that alcohol and other drug addiction is an illness.
- Foster new interests and participate in leisure activities the person enjoys, and encourage them to see old friends.

- Offer moral support for entering and maintaining treatment, and be willing to participate in group therapy sessions.
- Be patient and live one day at a time. Addiction generally takes a long time to develop, and recovery does not take place overnight. Try to understand that setbacks may occur.

### Remember *not* to:

- Punish, threaten, bribe or preach
- Cover up or make excuses for or shield an addicted person from the consequences of their behavior
- Feel guilty or responsible for their behavior
- Drink or take drugs with someone who abuses substances
- Take over their responsibilities so that they lose their sense of importance <sup>7</sup>



For more information on getting help for those in need of treatment visit the PDFA website at: <http://www.drugfree.org>



“Report every significant incident to the police and ask that a report be written...”

### **Document the problem and your problem-solving efforts meticulously**

- *Report every significant incident to the police* and ask that a report be written, even if the authorities cannot establish that a crime was committed. These reports help track and legitimize the problem. Ask police and crime prevention specialists for advice about what kinds of things should be reported immediately, and what kinds of things should simply be recorded in a log and turned in periodically.
- *Keep a log of suspected drug activity that you observe.* Regularly submit logs of observed drug activity to local police and keep copies for yourself. These logs help establish patterns of activity and who is

involved, and under certain circumstances, these logs can be used to obtain search warrants. Be sure to discuss with local police whether the way you are filling out the log provides the information they most need for the particular situation.

- *Keep a detailed record of every contact you make to get help,* including every phone call, letter, email and meeting. Once you have established a communication link with a helpful government employee, keep it. Note the person’s name and try to contact the same person every time.

*Continued on page 43*

If you see anything that is clearly dangerous or life threatening, or you have strong suspicions of either, call 9-1-1 immediately.

## Logging suspected illegal activity

**Describe people:** Take note of sex, race, age, height, weight, hair, complexion, scars, tattoos, glasses, facial hair, clothing, and anything else that would help police. If you don't have time to note all of these, pay the most attention to things the person cannot change. They can quickly change out of their clothing, but they can't quickly remove a tattoo or scar, or change their weight. If you know the person's name, use it.

**Describe vehicles:** License plate numbers are the most important pieces of information. Take note of license numbers and the direction in which the vehicle was traveling. Also note the vehicle's color, make, year, body style, and any other identifying characteristics such as dents or bumper stickers.

**Describe activities:** Provide as much detail as you can. For example: "I saw a person take a small orange-colored object out of their mouth and hand it to another person. The second person handed the first person money, which the first person put in their pants pocket." This description is much more useful than: "I saw a person dealing drugs."

**If you see anything that is clearly dangerous or life-threatening, or you have strong suspicions of either, call 9-1-1 immediately.**

Below is a sample log

Address of location:

Date	Time in/ Time Out	Repeat visitor? Y/N	Vehicle	Person(s)	Activity

Logged by (name & phone):

Turned in to:

Date:



A copy of this log can be downloaded  
at: [www.orpartnership.org](http://www.orpartnership.org)

*Continued from page 41*

### **Be polite, patient and persistent**

Ridding your neighborhood of illegal drug activity takes time. It can feel discouraging when “the system” doesn’t swoop in and immediately eliminate the problem. Don’t give up! These kinds of problems *can* be alleviated by well-organized neighbors working hand in hand with the police and other public agencies.

### **Look at the big picture**

What are the social conditions that exist in your neighborhood or the area as a whole that contributed to the problem in the first place? It may give you a sense of well-being and greater effectiveness to tackle those issues after your immediate problem is solved. Consider volunteering at a school, treatment facility or job-training center; testifying before local government officials or County Commission; or lobbying legislators to dedicate more dollars to enforcement, treatment and prevention. <sup>16</sup>



Our gratitude to the City of Portland, Oregon Office of Neighborhood Involvement for the content of this chapter and its dedication to building safe and healthy neighborhoods. For more information visit: [www.portlandonline.com/oni](http://www.portlandonline.com/oni)

# Communicating the Message Within Your Community ●

The media can be invaluable partners in conveying and enforcing your coalition's key messages and helping build safe, healthy and drug-free communities. Lasting relationships with newspapers and radio and television stations are critical to your coalition's success. A communications plan serves as the foundation for building public awareness and creating change. A successful communications plan outlines your coalition's goals, key messages, target audiences, strategies that help achieve the goals and a way to measure success.

## Building Successful Relationships with the Media

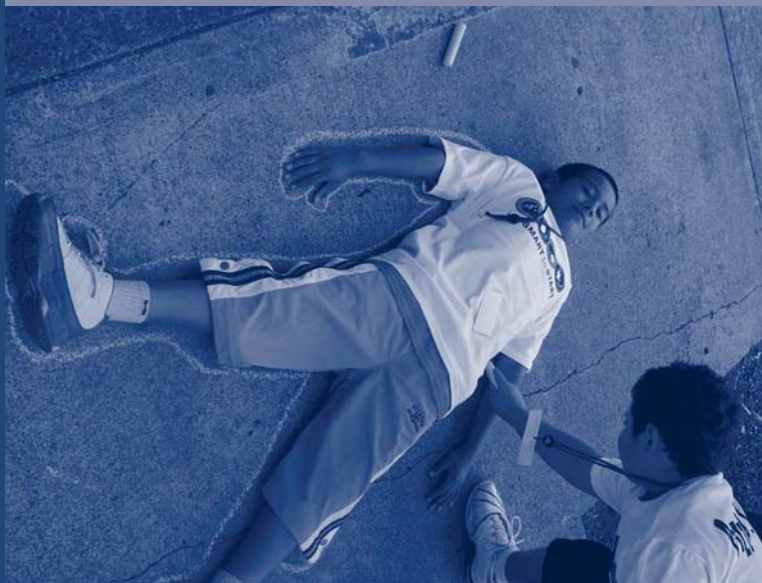
As you've learned in this guide, effective anti-drug coalitions are made up of a broad cross section of the community: substance abuse prevention and treatment

professionals; law enforcement and criminal justice representatives; elected officials; business leaders; youth; faith groups; people in recovery; and service club members.

That composition gives a coalition enormous legitimacy and power to educate and shape public opinion through the media. When thinking about the makeup of your coalition, consider inviting members of the media, as well as public relations professionals, to be a part of your organization. This has several benefits: Your coalition can cultivate champions for its efforts among reporters,



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**Youth-led prevention projects can be highly effective at raising public awareness through the media. One such project is a “chalk talk” in which youth create human outlines in chalk on sidewalks. Inside the drawings they write messages about activities they enjoy without alcohol and other drugs and the harms of youth substance use.**

editors and upper managers of media companies; your coalition can gain valuable knowledge and ideas about how best to gain media coverage of your issues; and your coalition can develop partnerships that allow it to leverage its financial resources and gain pro bono support for public service announcements.

### **Achieving “Earned” Media Coverage**

“Earned” media includes coverage of issues via news and feature stories, letters to the editor, guest commentaries and calendar listings. Reporters and editors often are inundated with news releases and story ideas.

However, keep in mind that you have an advantage given that the impacts of meth and other drugs are important to the health and safety of your community. Creativity and patience are important in working with the media. The following tips will help you build those successful relationships:

#### ***Make a list and check it ...often.***

An important first step in working successfully with the media is to develop a list of newspapers and radio and television stations in your community. Include the name of the publication or media outlet, its address, telephone and fax numbers, e-mail address and website. Update this list often to ensure its accuracy, and maintain both a hard copy and electronic version. Remember to include weekly newspapers,

**Spreading your message in rural communities:** We don’t all have major television stations in our communities. So if these large media outlets are not available, how can you spread prevention messages through your community? Consider the following options:

- Local newspaper
- Local radio stations
- Billboards
- Reader boards at banks and other local businesses
- Church bulletins and newsletters
- Civic club calendars and newsletters
- School district mailings to parents