How to Help a Friend or Family Member with a Drinking (Drug) Problem

If you think someone in your life has an alcohol or other drug problem, you can do something to help them. Oftentimes, that means putting yourself in a stressful or uncomfortable situation; you are in a position to have an impact and facilitate getting that individual the professional help they may need.

In deciding whether someone has a problem, you need to evaluate not only how much they are drinking or using, but also changes in their pattern of use, the reasons behind their use, and the impact of their use on their life (relationships, school and work performance, etc).

Here are some tips to keep in mind when speaking with someone about your concerns:

- Do not confront someone who is drunk or high. They are not in a state of mind where they can comprehend what you're trying to say.

- When you're talking with them, make sure to express your concern.

- Be specific about the behaviors that concern you- Stick to the facts. Use "I" statements rather than "You" statements (e.g., I'm concerned about your drinking rather than you drink too much).

- Make it clear that you dislike the behavior, not the person.

- Listen to what they have to say. Avoid lectures, threats, and verbal attacks.

- Let the person experience the consequences of their actions (unless life threatening).

- Do not be manipulated into taking over their responsibilities, covering up, making excuses, or lying for them. Sometimes the best thing you can do is to let them fail.

- Get a handle on your own use and do some soul searching about your own beliefs. They will be sure to bring it up.

- Talk to their friends, relatives, or other important people in their life and get them involved.

- Offer to go with them to get some help: Walk them over to the Counseling Center; Go with them to an AA (or other 12-step meeting); accompany them to their physician's office.
• Set limits around what you will do with them or for them (in regard to their drinking or using) and stick to those limits.

• Remember you can't control someone else's drinking or using. Don't get into a policing or babysitting role—it ultimately will not help. It's up to them to take responsibility for changing their behavior and participating in their recovery.

• Get consultation from a professional if you're still having trouble or concern about approaching an individual.