

# Concerned about a family member's substance use?

Get the facts, develop strategies and  
find out where to access more help.



**Breakthrough**

For Families **Queensland**

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Drug Information and Support

# What are psychoactive substances?

## What are “psychoactive drugs”?

any substance that affects the way someone..



Substances can be either

- **legal** (like tobacco, alcohol and caffeine) or
- **illegal** (like cannabis, heroin and methamphetamine).

Remember just because something is legal does not make it safe.

Alcohol - a legal substance – causes the biggest harms and cost to families across Australia and prescription opioids (painkillers) are the leading cause of drug overdose deaths.

## Substances are commonly classified as...

### Depressants

Slow down the central nervous system (e.g. alcohol, codeine, heroin, Valium)

### Stimulants

Speed up the central nervous system (e.g. caffeine, methamphetamine, nicotine)

### Hallucinogens

Distort senses, mood and thought (e.g. LSD, magic mushrooms)

*It is important to know that some substances like cannabis and ecstasy can have a combination of effects – such as a mix of stimulant, depressant and/or hallucinogenic qualities*

**It is important to remember that everybody reacts to drugs differently. The same substance used by the same person, at the same dose, may cause different effects, especially when used in different environments.**

# Why do people use substances?

People use substances for lots of different reasons. Some people use them to treat pain or relieve symptoms of anxiety or depression. Other people use them to enhance their enjoyment of activities or to assist in other areas of their life.

Whatever the reason, it is important to understand the purpose - or function - of the substance use in someone's life before it can be addressed.



## What is dependence?

If someone is:

- spending a great deal of time getting, using, or recovering from the effects of a substance;
- drinking or using in greater amounts, or for longer than originally planned;
- continuing to drink or use despite experiencing problems;
- needing to drink or use more of the substance to feel the same effects...

then it is possible that they might be 'dependent' upon that substance.

## What is alcohol and drug treatment?

### COUNSELLING

During counselling, people are encouraged to talk about their substance use and other issues such as their health, relationships, behaviours and lifestyle.

### DETOXIFICATION / WITHDRAWAL SERVICES

Where a person is supervised while their body comes off a drug. It can be "in-patient" or "out-patient", depending on how risky it is.

### REHABILITATION SERVICES

Rehabs provide a stable, longer term environment for people after they have detoxed. It can be either be residential or non-residential (e.g. 'day programs').

### PEER SUPPORT GROUPS

Voluntary self-help groups for people wanting help to address their substance use or maintain abstinence (e.g. AA, NA and Smart Recovery). Can also include Elders for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

*N.B. Service availability varies across Queensland.*

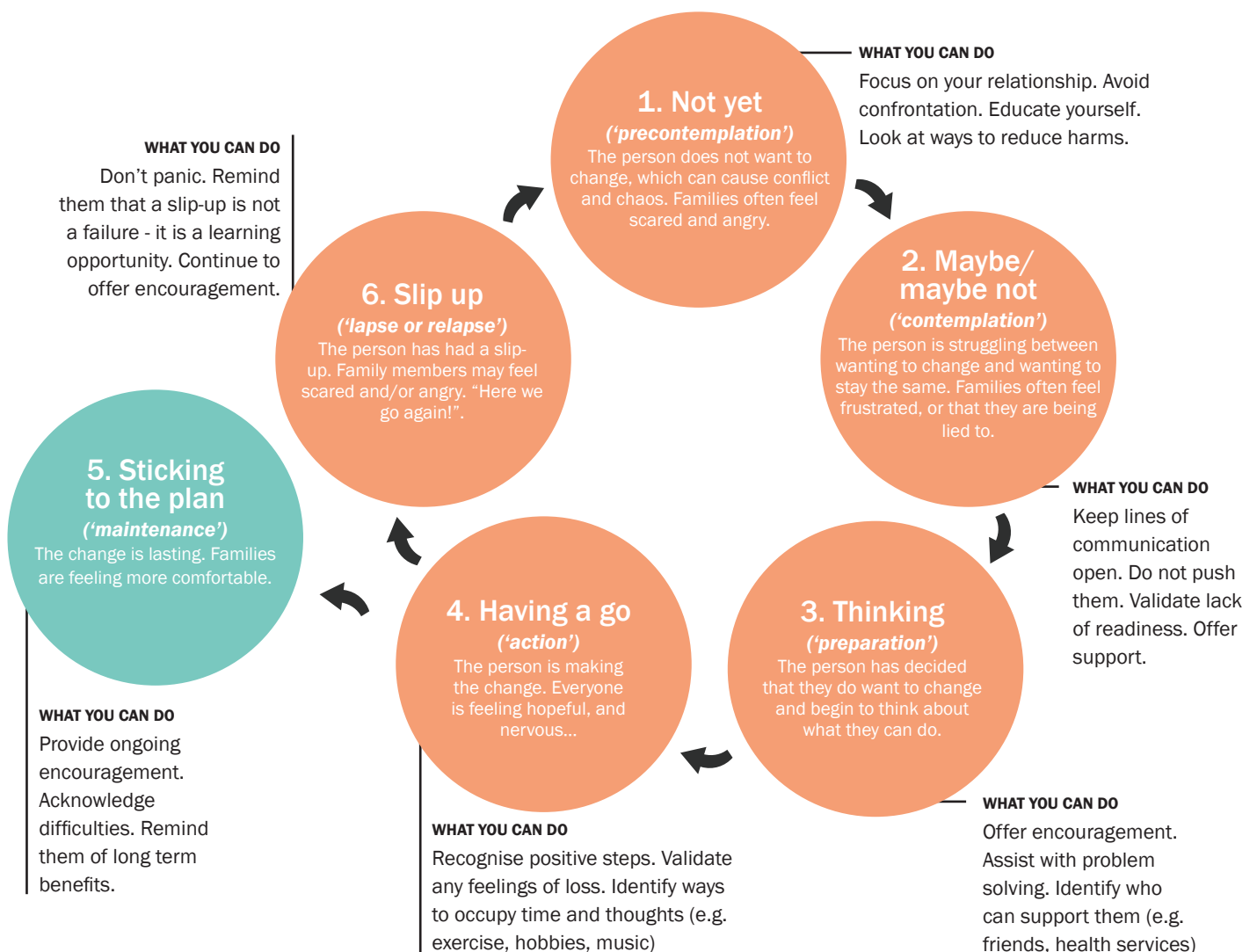
# What can families do?

It can be difficult to know how to respond, especially when the substance use causes changes to the way your family member behaves.

It is important to remember that families have different ways of coping when a family member is using substances. It is normal to feel angry, upset, scared or helpless. There is no 'right' way to respond.

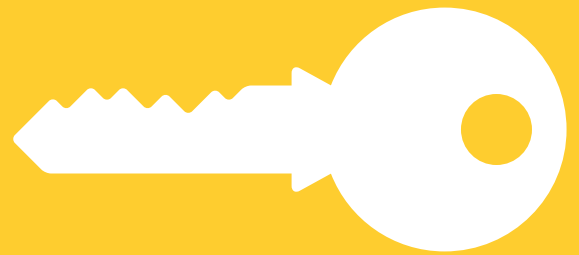
## The Stages of Change

The Stages of Change is a model that describes the phases that people move through when they make a significant change in their life. It can be useful to understand what stage your family member is in as it gives you clues on how you can best support them.



# Effective communication is key

- Preferably choose a time to talk when your family member is not intoxicated or 'coming down'.
- Ask questions. Listen. Try to find out what they like, and don't like about their substance use.
- Talk to them with respect, like an adult. Be conscious of your body language and tone.
- Talk to them about how they are feeling, rather than focusing on what they are doing.
- Try to remain non-judgmental.
- Let the person know how their drug use is impacting you. Use "I" statements, rather than "you" statements.
- Separate what is about the substance use, and what isn't. Separate the person from their behaviour.
- Encourage them to talk about their substance use with a GP or counsellor.



## Setting Boundaries

- Set clear, workable boundaries around what is and what is not OK in your home, space and relationship which are realistic for you and your family.
- Don't threaten or blame. Set realistic consequences that you can live with and communicate them clearly.
- Make sure that you are willing to follow through with the consequences. If you are not actually going to throw them out on to the street – don't threaten it!
- Remember. All family members must maintain the boundaries for them to work.
- Review your boundaries regularly.

# Supporting change

Acknowledge and celebrate any positive changes, no matter how small. Things like using less, using in a safer way or improving their health and lifestyle, are positive first steps.

Remember. Having a slip-up can be a part of the recovery process. It is also an opportunity to learn. Encourage them to keep going and not give up.

Encourage them to develop good sleep habits, eat a healthy diet, exercise regularly, avoid 'triggers' (i.e. people, places or events associated with using) and get active by doing things like sport, hobbies, interests, social activities etc.

Remember, people who are cutting back or quitting can sometimes experience low mood, anxiety, poor sleep or be irritable. Try to be extra gentle and understanding while their body and mind adjusts to the change.

## What if they're not ready?

If you are able to, still offer them support.

- See if you can enlist the help of other family members and friends to create a support network around them.
- Keep including them in family activities if possible. Do things with them to keep them engaged and to remind them that they are part of the family.

You can also encourage them to:

- Set limits on how much or for how long they will use (or how much they will spend).
- Not drink or use alone, and to avoid drink or drug driving.
- Stay connected with work, study, sport, interests and friends who don't drink or use drugs.
- Maintain their general health and wellbeing by eating well, staying hydrated, getting good sleep and having regular check-ups with their GP and dentist.

*“Remember change is not always a straight forward process”*



# Supporting children and siblings

- Children can be negatively affected by their family member's substance use.
- Parental substance use can affect children's sense of safety and wellbeing.
- Siblings often feel left out if all of the family's energy and attention is focused on their brother or sister's substance use.

Remember.

- Children have a right to be safe and protected.
- Children also have a right to be listened to and involved in decisions that affect them.

# Looking after yourself

- Connect with people who can support you. This can include other family members, friends, health professionals and community groups.
- Continue doing things that bring you pleasure and help you feel connected, strong and healthy. This could include seeing friends, exercise, hobbies, eating good meals or taking holidays.
- Avoid dwelling on the past. Try to maintain a sense of hope. Make plans so that you are looking forward to the future.

# Where can I go for more support?

**ADIS Queensland - Free 24/7 alcohol and drug support**  
Ph 1800 177 833 | [www.adis.health.qld.gov.au](http://www.adis.health.qld.gov.au)

**Family Drug Support - Free 24/7 telephone support, family support groups and information sessions**  
Ph 1300 368 186 | [www.fds.org.au](http://www.fds.org.au)

**Cracks in the Ice website – Online toolkit featuring information and resources about methamphetamine**  
[www.cracksintheice.org.au](http://www.cracksintheice.org.au)



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