

Family Support Starter Kit

Support someone you care about while making room for your own needs. Choose the section that fits today: ask for support, prepare a conversation, help with an appointment, or agree on practical arrangements. You do not have to complete every page.

Keep completed notes private. Use short notes in each box; continue on another copy or separate paper when needed. Save the completed PDF on your device and reopen it to check your notes before closing.

Included Sections

- What Support Do I Need as a Family Member?
- Comparing Family Support Groups
- I Am Worried About Someone: Preparing a Conversation
- Family Boundaries Without Punishment
- Helping With an Appointment
- Preparing for a Family Treatment Session
- Supporting Recovery After a Return Home
- Explaining a Parent's Treatment to a Child

Choose where to begin

What I need now	Start here
Support for myself	What Support Do I Need as a Family Member? Then Comparing Family Support Groups.
Words for a difficult conversation	I Am Worried About Someone, then Family Boundaries Without Punishment if needed.
Help with an agreed next step	Helping With an Appointment; use the family-session or return-home guide when it applies.
A child needs an explanation	Explaining a Parent's Treatment to a Child.

My own family-support contacts

A person or service for my support

Name/role; how to contact them; what they can help with; when they are available. This is your support contact, not permission to access another person's records.

A practical helper or backup

Name/contact; exact task they agreed to; what remains unconfirmed.

Reuse this contact page

When a section asks who can help you, refer back to "My own family-support contacts" and the role. Keep any treatment-team contact shared with you separate and use it only for the agreed purpose.

What Support Do I Need as a Family Member?

Your needs deserve attention while you support someone else. Start with the part of your own day that needs help; this is not an assessment of how well you are caring for another person.

SAMHSA recognizes that supporting a loved one can be taxing and encourages caregivers to attend to their own health. Family support groups, therapy or counseling are among the options families can explore. [1]

Original examples: name your need separately

What is happening	My own need	A request I could make
I keep canceling my appointments to help with rides.	Time to attend my own care.	Could you take one trip next week while I keep my appointment?

What is happening	My own need	A request I could make
I have nobody I can speak with honestly.	A confidential space to discuss my experience.	I am seeking support for myself as a family member. What do you offer?
Everything feels like my responsibility.	Help with a specific task and clearer limits.	Can we decide who will handle groceries this week?

Choose the kind of support you want

- Practical: a shared task, a ride, meals or time away from a responsibility.
- Personal: someone who can listen without asking you to solve everything.
- Professional: your own healthcare or counseling conversation.
- Peer: a group specifically for family members or other supporters; ask whom it serves and what participation involves.

My request, for me

One need I want to address

What I need and why it matters to my day.

Who I will ask and what I will say

Name/service; a specific request; how and when I will contact them.

If that option is unavailable

Another person/service or a smaller request; what I need help finding.

Permission to seek your own support

You do not have to turn this into a discussion of the other person's private records. Describe your own experience and ask the service about its confidentiality arrangements. This original planner does not depend on completing someone else's treatment plan.

Read more or take the next step

[SAMHSA: Helping Families Cope](https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/children-and-families/coping-resources)

<https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/children-and-families/coping-resources>

[SAMHSA: How to Ask for Help](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/how-to-cope/how-to-ask-for-help)

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/how-to-cope/how-to-ask-for-help>

Comparing Family Support Groups

You can seek support for yourself even while someone else is deciding about treatment. Compare the approach and practical fit of a meeting, then give yourself room to decide whether it helps.

Four Places to Start [3] [4] [5] [6]

Organization	Who it is for / approach	Where to check
Al-Anon	People affected by someone else's drinking; a mutual-support fellowship.	al-anon.org/newcomers/
Nar-Anon	People affected by someone else's addiction; a 12-step program. Narateen is for teens.	nar-anon.org/what-is-nar-anon/
SMART Recovery Family & Friends	Family and friends seeking support and practical tools while a loved one faces addiction.	smartrecovery.org/family
Families Anonymous	Relatives and friends concerned about drug use or related behavioral problems; a 12-step fellowship.	familiesanonymous.org

Ask Before the First Meeting

- Is this meeting for family/friends, and does it fit my age and situation?
- Is it online or in person? What is the current time, time zone and access process?
- Can a newcomer listen first? How is discussion handled?
- What approach does the group use, including any spiritual language?
- What are the privacy expectations? Are contributions optional or materials sold separately?

What to Notice Afterward

Did you feel heard and respected? Did the approach make sense to you? Was there something practical you want to try? One meeting does not have to determine your long-term choice. You can ask about a different group or format.

These organizations offer peer or mutual support; the descriptions are not ratings or proof that one approach works best for everyone. A support meeting does not provide emergency care or replace a clinician when medical or mental health treatment is needed. [3] [4] [5] [6]

Compare Your Experience

Meeting and access details

Organization, meeting name, format, time zone and contact.

What fit and what did not

Approach, welcome, privacy questions and something useful you heard.

Your next support step

Try again, contact another group or ask a professional about your own needs.

Use the Organizations' Current Meeting Information

[Al-Anon Family Groups: Newcomers](https://al-anon.org/newcomers/)

<https://al-anon.org/newcomers/>

[Nar-Anon: What Is Nar-Anon?](https://nar-anon.org/what-is-nar-anon/)

<https://nar-anon.org/what-is-nar-anon/>

[SMART Recovery Family & Friends](https://smartrecovery.org/family)

<https://smartrecovery.org/family>

[Families Anonymous](https://familiesanonymous.org/)

<https://familiesanonymous.org/>

I Am Worried About Someone: Preparing a Conversation

Use this guide to prepare a caring conversation about substance use. Focus on what you have noticed, what the person wants to share, and a realistic offer of help.

Make room for their view

SAMHSA recommends speaking with kindness, asking open questions and listening without judgment. More than one conversation may be needed. You can summarize what you heard and ask whether you understood it correctly, then ask what support the person wants. [7]

Before you begin [7] [2]

- Choose a time and place where you can speak privately and listen. Ask whether now is a workable time.
- Use a concrete observation instead of assigning a diagnosis or guessing a motive.
- Offer a specific task you can genuinely do, such as sitting together during a call or helping find a provider.
- If they do not want to talk, say that you are willing to listen later and ask whether a follow-up is welcome. Do not promise that one conversation will change their use.

A conversation, not an interrogation

Hypothetical example – adapt to the relationship [7]

Moment	Possible words
Ask to talk	"I care about you. Is this a good time to talk about something I have noticed?"
Describe an observation	"You said you wanted to cut back, and the last two mornings you seemed worried about drinking. What has that been like for you?"
Reflect rather than argue	"It sounds as though you want things to change but are worried about treatment. Have I understood?"
Offer a chosen next step	"Would it help if I sat with you while you call someone, or is there another kind of support you would prefer?"

Safety can change the conversation

An emergency is different from a planned discussion

If there is immediate physical danger, seek safety and call 911. If someone cannot be awakened or is breathing slowly or with difficulty, treat it as possible overdose: give naloxone if opioids may be involved and it is available, call 911 and stay with them if you can do so safely. Do not delay emergency help to persuade them to discuss treatment. [8] [9]

For emotional distress or a mental-health, suicide or substance-use crisis in the U.S., you can call or text 988 or chat at 988lifeline.org, including when you are concerned about another person. You can also seek support for your own wellbeing; caring for someone does not mean you must handle everything alone. [10] [1]

My conversation notes

One or two observations

Describe what you directly noticed and why it concerns you; leave out labels and guessed motives.

My opening and an open question

Use your own words and leave room for a different perspective.

What I heard

Their view, questions, preferences and anything I need to clarify.

Help I can offer and limits I need

A realistic task; what I cannot safely or reliably take on.

What we agreed, if anything

Who will do what, whether follow-up is welcome, and when. No agreement is also an honest result to record.

Support for me

A trusted person, counselor or family support option I can contact.

Keep completed notes private. Share only what you choose with the people helping you. These are original educational and planning prompts, not a validated assessment.

Useful next steps

[SAMHSA conversation guidance](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/helping-someone/how-to-talk-to-someone-about-help)

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/helping-someone/how-to-talk-to-someone-about-help>

[988 support for yourself or someone else](https://988lifeline.org/)

<https://988lifeline.org/>

[Find treatment options](https://findtreatment.gov/)

<https://findtreatment.gov/>

Family Boundaries Without Punishment

Use this guide to describe what you can offer, what you cannot do, and what you will do yourself. It is written for family members and other supporters making ordinary practical arrangements with another adult.

SAMHSA encourages supportive listening and attention to caregivers' own health. The boundary examples below are original communication prompts; they are not a tested treatment method or rules every household should adopt. [1] [7]

Original examples: describe your own action

A situation	A clear limit and an offer	Why the wording helps
Repeated requests for rides	I can drive on Tuesday after work. I cannot leave work every day. Let's ask about another option for Thursday.	States actual availability and a practical next step.
Late-night nonurgent calls	I will answer ordinary planning calls before 9 p.m. We can choose another time to talk tomorrow.	Describes your availability; does not promise to cover urgent needs.
Pressure to make a decision	I am not able to agree to that today. I need time to understand what you are asking.	Allows time without making a threat.

Check the boundary before saying it

- Does it describe an action or resource that is actually mine to decide?
- Can I say it without demanding a confession, agreement or change of feeling?
- Am I offering help I can realistically give?
- Have I separated an ordinary arrangement from an urgent or unsafe situation?

Prepare one conversation

The practical issue

Describe what has happened and what it affects for you, without assigning a label.

My limit and any offer

I can __. I cannot __. If helpful, I can offer __ instead.

How I will follow through and seek support

An action within my control; a trusted person or professional to help me think it through.

If the situation involves safety, housing or control

Do not use this worksheet as an eviction notice, punishment plan or confrontation script. If stating a limit could expose you to threats or harm, seek individual support before attempting the conversation. Serious safety or housing questions need help specific to that situation.

Revisit what can change

An arrangement can be reviewed as circumstances change. Another adult may disagree; this exercise cannot guarantee their response or decide either person's rights.

Read more or take the next step

[SAMHSA: Helping Families Cope](https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/children-and-families/coping-resources)

<https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/children-and-families/coping-resources>

[SAMHSA: Talking to Someone About Help](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/helping-someone/how-to-talk-to-someone-about-help)

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/helping-someone/how-to-talk-to-someone-about-help>

Helping With an Appointment

Ask what help the person wants before arranging it. You can offer a limited, useful task such as a ride, company in the waiting room, or help remembering a question.

SAMHSA recommends listening, asking how support would help and agreeing on follow-up. In treatment, family involvement can reflect the wishes of the person receiving care. [7] [11]

Original example: helping while leaving choices with the person

Moment	A useful offer
Before the visit	Would you like a ride, someone to wait with you, or help making a question list?
At the appointment	Would you like me to come in, or wait outside?
During the conversation, if invited	You asked me to help remember the cost question. Would you like to ask it now?
Afterward	Is there any follow-up you would like help with? I can make time on Thursday.

Agree on the task first

- Confirm the date, pickup or meeting place, and the time you are both allowing.
- Ask whether they want you present, speaking or taking notes; do not treat one permission as permission for all three.
- Ask before contacting the provider on their behalf; the provider may need its own permission process.
- Agree where any notes belong and what should stay private.
- Say when you are unavailable so a backup can be arranged.

Our practical agreement

What help was requested

The task, what I can offer, and anything they do not want me to do.

Visit and travel details they want me to know

Date/time/place; confirmed arrangements; backup contact.

Question or follow-up they want supported

Their priority, my agreed role, and the next contact/time.

If preferences change

Check again rather than insisting on the original arrangement. “Would you like me to step out?” can be enough. This is a practical support planner for a willing adult, not a guide to overriding consent or handling a medical emergency.

Read more or take the next step

[SAMHSA: Talking to Someone About Help](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/helping-someone/how-to-talk-to-someone-about-help)

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/helping-someone/how-to-talk-to-someone-about-help>

[SAMHSA: Finding Quality Treatment](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/learn-about-treatment/finding-quality-treatment)

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/learn-about-treatment/finding-quality-treatment>

Preparing for a Family Treatment Session

A family session can involve different hopes and concerns. Ask what the session is for, who is taking part, and how the clinician wants each person to prepare.

SAMHSA’s quality-treatment guidance describes family involvement as something that can be included when desired by the person receiving care. Family-support guidance also points to therapy and counseling for the family. This worksheet does not decide who may participate or what information a clinician may disclose. [11] [1]

Questions for the clinician before the session

Topic	Ask before assuming
Purpose	Is this treatment planning, family therapy, education or another kind of meeting?
Participants	Who will attend? How are agreement and participation arranged?
Privacy	What is recorded or shared, with whom, and what are the limits of confidentiality?
Speaking and disagreement	How will everyone have a chance to speak? Can someone ask for a pause or a separate conversation?
Access	What communication, interpreter, technology or accessibility arrangements can we make?

Original example: bring an issue, not a verdict

Instead of “Make them understand how wrong they are,” an agenda item could be: “We disagree about rides to appointments. I want us to understand the schedule and what help each person can offer.” The session can still leave some issues unresolved.

My preparation

My most important issue or question

Describe an example and what you hope to understand or work out.

Privacy or participation questions to ask first

What do I want clarified before sharing? Keep anything especially sensitive on a separate private note if preferred.

Before the meeting ends

- Ask what, if anything, was agreed.
- Name any issue that is still unresolved.
- Confirm who will take each next step and how follow-up will happen.
- Ask whom to contact with questions about the session or plan.

The follow-up we actually agreed**Agreement, person and next step**

Write only confirmed arrangements. Keep unanswered issues visible.

Keep this an invitation to discussion

This is an original session organizer, not a contract or a tool for obtaining another person's private information. Ask the clinician how to handle concerns that do not feel safe to raise together.

Read more or take the next step**SAMHSA: Finding Quality Treatment**

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/learn-about-treatment/finding-quality-treatment>

SAMHSA: Helping Families Cope

<https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/children-and-families/coping-resources>

Supporting Recovery After a Return Home

Plan the ordinary arrangements of returning home together, where it is safe and appropriate to do so. The person returning and the people at home can each name their own needs, offers and limits.

SAMHSA includes family participation when desired and practical life supports among quality-care considerations. NIAAA recommends discussing continuing care and how a program supports the transition after treatment. Use actual care-team instructions alongside this household conversation. [11] [12]

Original worked example: an agreement has an owner

Issue	Fictional agreement	Review or uncertainty
Appointments	The person returning will confirm the visit; their partner can drive on Tuesday.	Thursday transport is still unconfirmed.
Privacy	No treatment updates will be sent to extended family without discussing it first.	Revisit if someone wants help telling a relative.
Household tasks	Share dinner planning for the first week; agree who shops.	Talk again Sunday about what was manageable.
Check-ins	Both agree to a short practical conversation after dinner on Sunday.	Either can ask to choose another time.

Topics to choose from

- Rest, personal space and communication preferences.
- Appointments, travel and any care arrangements the person wants help coordinating.
- Meals, chores, work and caregiving responsibilities.
- What help each person offers and what they cannot do.
- How to raise a concern, request a change or contact professional support.

Our agreed arrangements

Person returning: what I want help with and what I want to handle myself

Write only what you choose to share with the household.

Other household members: needs, offers and limits

Name each person's practical role without assigning them responsibility for another adult's recovery.

Confirmed plan and open questions

Task; who agreed to it; when; what needs checking. Use another copy for more arrangements.

When and how we will review it

Date/opportunity; who will join; the contact to ask if care questions arise.

Keep the plan in its lane

A household plan is not treatment, surveillance, a sobriety contract or a guarantee against return to use. Do not use it to change medicines or require someone to hand over private care records. Ask the care team about clinical concerns and use its existing urgent-contact instructions when relevant.

Reuse contacts rather than making a new directory

Keep the relevant details on My Recovery Support Map (AH-R150), if the person wants to share them. A family member can also keep their own support contacts. Agreement to one task does not authorize all access to someone's information.

Read more or take the next step

[SAMHSA: Finding Quality Treatment](https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/learn-about-treatment/finding-quality-treatment)

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/learn-about-treatment/finding-quality-treatment>

[NIAAA: Questions for Alcohol Treatment Programs](https://alcohol.treatment.niaaa.nih.gov/how-to-find-alcohol-treatment/10-questions-for-alcohol-treatment-programs)

<https://alcohol.treatment.niaaa.nih.gov/how-to-find-alcohol-treatment/10-questions-for-alcohol-treatment-programs>

Explaining a Parent's Treatment to a Child

Children need an explanation they can understand and a clear plan for who will care for them. Start with what they have noticed. Use the examples below as starting words, then answer the child's actual questions.

Keep Three Things Clear [13]

- The problem is not the child's fault or responsibility to fix.
- Name the adult who will care for them and explain the next familiar part of the day.
- Leave room for feelings and questions. If you do not know an answer, say what you will find out.

For a Younger Child

Example wording: "Dad is getting help for a health problem. You did not cause it. Aunt Maya will pick you up and stay with you tonight. You can ask me questions, and you do not have to make Dad better." Replace the people and plans with what is actually true.

For a Child Who Wants More Detail

Example wording: "Alcohol has been causing problems, and Mom is getting treatment. Treatment means working with people who help her make changes and stay safer. This is an adult responsibility. What have you noticed, and what are you wondering about?"

For an Older Child or Teen

Example wording: "You may have noticed things we have not explained well. I want to be honest without asking you to manage the situation. Your parent is getting help for substance use. You can talk with another trusted adult, too. What do you need to know about this week?"

Do not promise that a problem will never happen again. Give a return date only when it is confirmed, and explain that plans can change. Say what is known now: who is caring for the child, what routine stays the same, and when you will check in again. These sample scripts are conversation aids, not a required age-based formula.

Make the Care Plan Concrete

What the child already knows or has asked

Their words, concerns and what needs a simple explanation.

Who is caring for the child

Names, phone numbers, school pickup, meals, bedtime and backup arrangements.

What you will say and check next

Only promises you can keep; trusted adult the child can contact; next check-in.

More Support for Children

[Sesame Workshop: parental addiction resources](https://sesameworkshop.org/topics/parental-addiction/)

<https://sesameworkshop.org/topics/parental-addiction/>

[Find treatment help](https://www.addictionhelp.com/find-treatment-help/)

<https://www.addictionhelp.com/find-treatment-help/>

Sources

[1] SAMHSA: Helping Families Cope

<https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/children-and-families/coping-resources>

[2] SAMHSA: How to Ask for Help

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/how-to-cope/how-to-ask-for-help>

[3] Al-Anon Family Groups: Newcomers

<https://al-anon.org/newcomers/>

[4] Nar-Anon: What Is Nar-Anon?

<https://nar-anon.org/what-is-nar-anon/>

[5] SMART Recovery Family & Friends<https://smartrecovery.org/family>**[6] Families Anonymous**<https://familiesanonymous.org/>**[7] SAMHSA: Talking with someone about help**<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/helping-someone/how-to-talk-to-someone-about-help>**[8] SAMHSA: 988 versus 911**<https://www.samhsa.gov/resource/988/988-versus-911-social-media-post>**[9] CDC: Preventing Opioid Overdose**<https://www.cdc.gov/overdose-prevention/prevention/>**[10] SAMHSA: 988 Frequently Asked Questions**<https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/988/faqs>**[11] SAMHSA: Finding Quality Treatment**<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-support/learn-about-treatment/finding-quality-treatment>**[12] NIAAA: Questions for Alcohol Treatment Programs**<https://alcoholtreatment.niaaa.nih.gov/how-to-find-alcohol-treatment/10-questions-for-alcohol-treatment-programs>**[13] Sesame Workshop: Parental Addiction**<https://sesameworkshop.org/topics/parental-addiction/>