

Recovery Support

for opioid use disorder

NIH
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HEALing Communities Study
Ohio

INTRODUCTION

Recovery from opioid use disorder (drug addiction) isn't easy, even with the use of proven medications.

When you feel the people you care about most are on your side, it's a big help in your fight against this disease.

TYPES OF RECOVERY SUPPORT

Peer Recovery Support

You may want to seek support from other people who are in recovery. Many people find talking openly with others "who have been there" can be very helpful and meaningful. Ask your provider about groups that support medication treatment. You're not alone; others have been there and the journey is easier with support.

Using medications to treat opioid use disorder is a relatively new approach. Sometimes, local chapters of groups such as AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) or NA (Narcotics Anonymous) do not support or accept people currently taking medications because they might not fully understand the scientific evidence showing its effectiveness. Check with your medication provider for information about which local groups they recommend. If you would like to seek this information out yourself, local chapters of AA and NA typically have websites that list their contact information with an email address or phone number. Reach out and ask which groups are open to people being treated with medications for opioid use disorder.

There are many more options for groups today than ever before. Programs like SMART Recovery (smartrecovery.org) welcome people on medications to treat their opioid use

disorder. A number of groups meet entirely online which helps make support possible if transportation or health concerns are obstacles for attending a group in person or if there is no local peer recovery group that is supportive of MOUD. Note that many of these support organizations have [phone or virtual \(online\) groups](#) that started during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Friends and Family Support

Helping them Understand Medication Treatment

Sometimes, your family and friends may not understand how opioid use disorder is best treated.

You may hear them say things like, “Aren’t you just taking another drug?” Or, “You’ve been taking that for a few months now. Can’t you just quit?” Or, “Are you hooked on that now, too?”

If you have a treatment counselor, you can ask how to respond best to comments like this.

If you don’t, here are a few suggestions:

- Remind them that you are following your doctor’s instructions, and that it is working for you. You will taper off when your provider tells you that you no longer need the medication to treat your disorder.
- Tell your loved ones that research shows you are more likely to succeed in treatment with their encouragement. Ask them if they think you were better off when you were using drugs not as prescribed or illegally. Then, explain that the doctors say that taking medication is the most likely route to recovery.
- Ask them to read the booklet enclosed in this packet. It will help them better understand your treatment and the role they can play in your recovery.
- There is a very short video that might be useful for them to see, giving the scientific reasons that recovery from drug dependence can be so challenging: <https://www.drugabuse.gov/videos/why-are-drugs-so-hard-to-quit>

Asking for the Support You Need

Sometimes, you may need specific forms of help from family and friends. For example, you might have a problem with getting to your appointments. You might need someone to watch your children while you go to appointments or attend a support group meeting. Conversations about getting help with these things will be important.

Again, if you have a counselor, that’s the first place to go for advice on how to ask for such help.

If not, we have an approach that has worked for others:

1. Explain what you need and why. If people know the reasons you are asking for something, they are more likely to help out.
2. Then, ask if your friend or family member can help in a specific way. Sometimes people think they know what someone would find helpful, but they can be wrong—that can lead to frustration on all sides. Being specific with your request lets them know exactly what they can do to be helpful and avoids misunderstandings.
3. If they cannot help in that way, tell them you understand and ask if they have any ideas for other solutions. This gets them involved so that you are working together to solve a problem.

For example, let's say you don't have childcare but need to attend some important appointments. If you approach the person and say, "Can you watch my kids Thursday afternoons?", there is a chance that it might not work out as well as you hope. What someone might think about when they hear this are all the ways it might be a problem for them ("It's probably going to take all day."; "The only way I can be helpful is if I agree to watch the kids every week.")

Approaching it another way, you might say "I need to attend my peer support group online every week. I don't have childcare during that time we meet on Thursday afternoons. Would you be able to watch them for an hour while I attend?" This is more likely to get someone thinking about how they can help. If they can't do it every week, or don't want to do it every week, they may be willing to come up with some ideas to help you attend the group regularly.

Ways to Ask for Help:

- "Can you watch my kids Thursday afternoons?"
- "I need to attend my peer support group online every week. I don't have childcare during that time we meet on Thursday afternoons. Would you be able to watch them for an hour while I attend?"

YOUR RECOVERY JOURNEY

If you are reading this, you have already decided you want to recover from opioid use disorder. You have started medication treatment, which is an incredibly brave and important step.

You have our best wishes for your journey to recovery and our hopes that you can find helpful support. If you struggle to find support even after using these tips, please talk to your healthcare provider or treatment team.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information, please visit the HEALing Communities Study website at www.HealTogetherOH.org.

