

## Treatment:

When there is substance abuse in a family, all members will likely benefit from treatment at some point. Everyone may not be ready to deal with the impact on his or her life at the same time, but that need not stop those who are ready to begin. Each member of the family system must decide that s/he is ready to make changes in his/her life. The family (either the whole or parts) can begin treatment long before the abuser is ready to make changes. Some options for treatment include:

- 12-Step programs—AA, NA, SMART recovery, Al-Anon, Al-a-Teen
- Outpatient treatment—individual, family, couples, group
- Inpatient/residential treatment for the abuser with family involvement

Although it seems strange, the family will often become uncomfortable with the changes that have been made and can even feel like it was better when the abuser was using because the behavior had become familiar and predictable in its own way. A family that has learned to function with dysfunction will often create dysfunction to feel normal, but a new way of living can be learned.

Substance abusers as well as family members frequently have co-occurring mental or physical health disorders. These must be treated for full healing to take place. It is important to tell the “whole story” to your healthcare provider.



## Sunshine Community Health Center

HC89 Box 8190  
Talkeetna, AK 99676  
(Mile 4.4 Talkeetna Spur Rd.)  
(907) 733-2273 or (907) 495-4100



Books available  
for loan at SCHC:

- Breaking Free – Pia Melody and Miller
- Co-Dependence: Misunderstood- Mistreated –Anne Wilson Schaef
- Co-Dependent’s Guide to the Twelve Steps – Melody Beattie
- It Will Never Happen to Me – Claudia Black
- The Dilemma of the Alcoholic Marriage – Al-Anon Family Groups

To find information online,  
scan the QR code or visit:

[www.sunshineclinic.org/behavioral-health/  
substance-abuse](http://www.sunshineclinic.org/behavioral-health/substance-abuse)



# Living with Substance Abuse

## Learn:

- What is Substance Abuse
- How to Recognize it
- What are the Impacts on Families
- Treatment Options



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## What is Substance Abuse?

Substance abuse is the problematic use of alcohol or drugs. These drugs can be illegal drugs, drugs prescribed by a doctor for a legitimate medical reason, or over-the-counter drugs and other substances that can have mind-altering effects when they are misused. Sometimes the abuser is addicted to the substance being abused, but not always. The person who is abusing the substances may agree that problems are created by his/her use; however more often the substance abuser does not believe that his/her use is a problem.

## Denial

Denial comes in many forms and is exhibited by both the substance abuser and family members. Blaming the problem on outside forces such as the job, the spouse, the kids, etc.

- Underestimating the use and its impact — “It’s only a few beers and I’m not hurting anyone.”
- Rationalizing the use — “at least she doesn’t drive under the influence”
- Excusing the use — “He had such a tough life, it’s no wonder he uses drugs.”

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## Recognize Substance Abuse

Substance abuse has a progressive pattern that can be different for individual abusers depending on their personality, mental and emotional state, physical condition, and drugs of choice. However there are many common signs and symptoms including:

### Physical signs

- Abnormal amounts or energy—either high or low
- Sleeping a great deal or not enough
- Unusual calmness, unresponsiveness or looking “spaced out”
- Health problems
- Chronic nasal problems
- Chronic cough or bronchitis
- Sudden weight loss or gain
- Sexual problems
- Dental problems
- Appearance of drug paraphernalia

### Mental/Emotional signs

- Depression and apathy
- Anxiety, paranoia, delusions
- Increased irritability, anger
- Lower violence threshold
- Suicide attempts

### Social Signs

- Problems in the family
- Violence in the family
- Problems at work or school
- Problems with the law

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## Impact on the Family

There are significant impacts on the family functioning when there is a substance abuser in the home. Like the substance abuse itself, these impacts have a progressive pattern and can be extremely varied depending on the individual family system. Some typical ways that substance abuse can impact the family include:

### Impaired structure

- Unstable daily routines
- Role confusion
- Dysfunctional roles—hero, baby, etc.
- Children grow up too fast

### Impaired Problem Solving

- Ineffective short-term solutions
- Decisions aren’t followed
- There must be a crisis in order for action to occur
- Attempts are made to fix problems other than the substance abuse

### Impaired Communication

- Disagreements with the abuser are not allowed
- Denying or stuffing feelings
- Using blaming statements rather than “I” statements
- Keeping the secret of the substance abuse is of primary importance
- Communicating through behavior rather than words