

Aggression, alcohol and drug use in the home

Support guide for Adults

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What is this guide about?

This guide provides information for adults on how alcohol and other drugs can influence a person's behaviour, including behaviours that are aggressive, abusive and violent.

There are useful strategies, supports and resources for someone to consider when they are concerned about a family member's behaviours.

If you are experiencing or exposed to violence and aggression from a family member who is using alcohol and other drugs, information and support services are available to help you, including:

- Services and resources to support you and your children if you feel unsafe
- Alcohol and other drug treatment services if your family member needs help



- If in **immediate** danger, call **Triple Zero (000)**
- Call the **NSW Domestic Violence Line** on **1800 65 64 63** for counsellors 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Interpreters are available and all calls are confidential. If you are hearing impaired, call the National Relay Service on **133 677**
- **1800RESPECT** on **1800 737 732** or the online chat here: <https://chat.1800respect.org.au/#/welcome>
- **NSW Rape Crisis: 1800 424 017** or [online](#)
- If you are worried about your own behaviour and use of violence, contact the **Men's Referral Service** online or by phone on **1300 766 491**.
- Kids Helpline on **1800 55 1800** or kidshelpline.com.au
- Lifeline on **13 11 14** or lifeline.org.au
- Alcohol and Drug Information Service on **1800 250 015**



Alcohol and other drug use

People use alcohol and other drugs for many different reasons. To relax, have fun, be social or part of a group, they can also be used to avoid physical or emotional pain and to cope with problems, stress and/or boredom.

The response someone has to a drug can depend on which drug they take, how much they take, if they mix it with other drugs or alcohol, the setting they take it in and their emotional, physical and mental health at the time.

If someone is dependent on alcohol or other drugs, they could feel like they need to take the drug just to get through the day. They may feel the need to increase the amount they take in order to feel its effects. If they suddenly stop using the drug they can go into withdrawal. Depending on the drug, this can present as feelings of agitation, cravings or 'hanging out' for the drug, sleep changes, anxiety, depression, exhaustion and physical aches and pains. Withdrawing from some drugs, particularly alcohol or benzodiazepines, can be life threatening – call an ambulance if you are worried about their health and safety.



Behaviours that might increase alcohol and other drug use

The following behaviours are often seen, as substance use increases or becomes more regular and more difficult to maintain control over (based on DSM-5 Criteria for Substance Use Disorders, 2020):

- Cravings to use the substance
- Wanting to cut down or stop but not managing to
- Taking the substance in larger amounts or for longer than you're meant to
- Neglecting other parts of your life because of substance use
- Continuing to use, even when it causes problems in relationships
- Using substances even when it puts you in danger

Alcohol and other drug use and violence and aggression

Most people do not become aggressive or violent when using alcohol and other drugs; however research (Sophie Yates, 2019) shows it can increase the risk of aggression and/or violence in people who:

- use a combination of drugs at the same time, or combine alcohol use with another drug
- are withdrawing or 'coming down' from using a drug
- have a history of being aggressive or violent in the past
- are using performance and image enhancing drugs
- are also experiencing mental health issues or have a history of mental health issues
- have increased stress including difficulties in their life for example, financial, legal, health, housing, relationship problems, etc.

Family members need to be aware of what happens when someone uses alcohol or other drugs and the potential stages of intoxication. This will help them understand when there may be increased risk of abusive, violent behaviours and help them plan for their safety.





What do I do if a person is experiencing psychosis?

Psychosis is a collection of symptoms that occur together over a period of time. The most prominent symptoms of psychosis are delusions (belief something is real when it isn't) and hallucinations (seeing and hearing things that aren't real). When this happens, a person can lose touch with reality, and will have trouble telling the difference between what is real and what is not.



Psychosis can affect the way a person thinks, feels and behaves. It can happen due to the person having a mental illness, being intoxicated from alcohol or another drug or as a reaction to major stress. People with psychosis are not usually aggressive and are at a much higher risk of harming themselves than others. However, certain symptoms of psychosis (e.g. delusions or hallucinations) can cause people to become aggressive.

The most common symptoms include visual hallucinations, disorientation and memory problems. Psychosis can also occur when someone suddenly stops drinking alcohol or taking drugs after using them for a long time, this is known as 'coming down' or withdrawal (National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, 2011).

When a family member uses alcohol and other drugs and experiences psychosis causing them to behave in an aggressive or violent manner, the following strategies might help you stay safe:

- Do not threaten them as this may increase fear or trigger aggressive behaviour
- Avoid raising your voice or talking too fast
- Stay calm and avoid nervous behaviour for example, shuffling your feet, fidgeting or making fast movements
- Do not restrict the person's movement. For example, if they want to pace up and down the room, let them
- Take any threats or warnings seriously
- Never put yourself at risk, if you are frightened or feel threatened, remove yourself from the situation and call police on **Triple Zero (000)**



Alcohol and other drugs and domestic and family violence

In many circumstances, aggression and violence with alcohol and other drugs use can be part of a broader range of behaviours that are in fact **domestic and family violence**. Domestic and family violence includes a range of violent and abusive behaviours, physical violence and often a range of other controlling behaviours; for example, your partner or family member:

- makes you feel afraid
- puts you down
- is jealous
- forces you to do things you don't want to do
- threatens you or your loved ones
- monitors your movements or online activity
- limits your ability to access, use and maintain financial resources

If they use alcohol and/or other drugs and these behaviours, there is a risk these behaviours and the use of physical, emotional and sexual violence and abuse will increase in severity and frequency.

There are services that can work with you to improve your safety and the safety of others, if you are experiencing domestic and family violence.

It is really important you know:

- Violence is never okay.
- The person using the violence is making a choice to use this behaviour. It is not the fault of other family members.
- No matter what is happening there is always support available.

Planning for your safety

Safety planning is thinking about things you can do to be safer when living with aggression, violence or abuse. These might be as simple as contacting a friend when there is violence where you live.

If you are experiencing domestic and family violence there are services available to work with you to identify strategies and actions that you can take when you feel unsafe. The NSW Domestic Violence Line (1800 65 64 63) or 1800 RESPECT can support you with safety planning. For more information on Safety Planning go to:

www.1800respect.org.au/help-and-support/safety-planning

You can contact Family Drug Support for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week telephone support for families and carers in crisis on 1300 368 186 or go to: www.fds.org.au FDS is staffed by volunteers who have lived experience of family members with alcohol and other drug use issues. FDS also provide face-to-face support meetings and resources for family members.

When contacting services it is important to be aware phones or computers may be used to track victims' whereabouts, what they are doing, who they communicate with, even after separation. Consider using a safer device for example a trusted friend's phone or at the library. Visit the eSafety Commissioner website for more information.





How can I help children in my care affected by someone's alcohol and other drug use and aggression?

When a parent or family member's alcohol or other drug use causes them to be aggressive or violent, it may pose a risk to children and young people's safety, health and wellbeing. Children do not need to be physically present to aggression, violence or substance use to be impacted by it and the effects can continue into adulthood. Protective factors to lessen the lasting impact of adverse childhood experiences (for example domestic and family violence, and substance use) include safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments and engagement with appropriate support services.

There are a range of services, supports and resources that are available to assist you and children in your care.

Some key resources include:

- [Managing aggression, alcohol and drug use in the home: A guide for those concerned about children 5-12 years](#)
- [Coping with aggression, alcohol and drug use in the home: A guide for teenagers](#)

Information and resources to support children and young people affected by domestic and family violence is available from 1800 RESPECT. [Family Connect and Support](#) can help families to access necessary services in their area, including drug and alcohol services and youth support services. Please see 'Help, support services and resources' for further information.

Help, support services and resources

In addition to your existing networks such as neighbours, family and friends, the following services and resources may be relevant to your family situation.

Emergency Call Service - Police, Fire, Ambulance

-  000
-  TTY number: 133 677 (If you are speech or hearing impaired - call the National Relay Service)
-  Use the Australian Text Emergency Relay Service:
One Zero Six (106) text based service

000 (also known as Triple Zero) is the primary national emergency number in Australia.

The Australian 106 Text Emergency Relay Service provided as part of the National Relay Service (NRS) is available 24 hours a day 365 days a year. Calls made using the 106 service are given priority over other NRS calls.

NSW Domestic Violence Line

-  1800 65 64 63
-  13 14 50 (Translating and Interpreting Services)
-  facs.nsw.gov.au/domestic-violence/helpline

NSW Domestic Violence line provides 24 hours, 7 days a week state-wide telephone crisis counselling and referral service for women and persons who identify as female.

1800RESPECT

-  1800RESPECT (1800 737 732)
-  1800respect.org.au

1800RESPECT is the national sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service; confidential service available 24 hours, 7 days a week. Provides support for:

- People experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, sexual assault, domestic or family violence; their friends and family*
- Workers and professionals supporting someone experiencing, or at risk of experiencing sexual assault, domestic or family violence*

Men's Referral Services (MRS)

 1300 766 491

 ntv.org.au

 ntv.org.au/get-help (Provides referral for men)

Men's Referral Services, which is for men who use violence, as well as family, friends and support workers provides telephone counselling, information and referral service operating nationally. It is a central point of contact for men taking responsibility for their violent behaviour.

Family Connect and Support

 familyconnectsupport.dcj.nsw.gov.au

Family Connect and Support (formerly Family Referral Services), a state-wide network of non-government organisations engage and assist children, young people and families who need additional support to access services. They link families to a range of local support services, including case management, housing, parenting education, supported playgroup, drug and alcohol/mental health services, youth support services and respite care.

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)

 1800 250 015

 yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au/getting-help/Pages/adis.aspx

ADIS is a 24-hour 7 day a week free, confidential and anonymous telephone service providing counselling, support, referrals and information for those affected by alcohol or other drugs.

Lifeline

 13 11 14

 lifeline.org.au

Lifeline is a 24-hour 7 days a week free crisis support and suicide prevention service.

Kids Helpline

 1800 55 1800

 kidshelpline.com.au

Kids Helpline is a free, private, and confidential 24 hours, 7 days a week telephone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25.

Family Drug Support (FDS)

 1300 368 186

 fds.org.au

FDS provides 24-hour, 7 days a week free telephone support for families and friends affected by alcohol and drug use.

Child Protection Helpline

 13 2111

 facs.nsw.gov.au/families/Protecting-kids

Child Protection Helpline is a 24 hours, 7 days a week state-wide call centre staffed by professionally qualified caseworkers. They receive and screen all reports about suspected abuse or neglect of a child or young person or those at risk of harm from abuse or neglect.

Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council (AHMRC)

 ahmrc.org.au

AHMRC provides links to Aboriginal community controlled health services across NSW.

Drug and Alcohol Multicultural Education Centre (DAMEC)

 8706 0150

 damec.org.au

DAMEC's mission is to reduce the harm associated with the use of alcohol and other drugs within culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in New South Wales.

CatholicCare (CCareline)

 13 18 19

 catholiccare.org/family-and-individual-services

CatholicCare supports individuals, couples and families through the challenges of relationships, parenting and separation.

Parentline

 1300 1300 52

 parentline.org.au

Parent Line is a telephone counselling, information and referral service for parents, carers of children aged 0 to 18 who live in New South Wales. The line operates weekdays 9am-9pm and weekends from 4pm-9pm.

NSW Mental Health Line

 1800 011 511

 health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/Pages/Mental-Health-Line.aspx

NSW Mental Health line operates a 24 hours, 7 days a week mental health telephone access service. Anyone with a mental health issue can speak with a professional and be directed to the right care for them.

Relationships Australia NSW

 1300 364 277

 enquiries@ransw.org.au

 relationshipsnsw.org.au

Relationships Australia is a not-for-profit organisation with no religious affiliations. Their goal is to promote relationships that are safe, healthy and strong; dedicated to enhancing relationships within families and their communities to foster personal and social wellbeing. Groups and Individual Counselling regarding Healthy Relationships and men Taking Responsibility programs are available.

Open Arms Veterans & Families Counselling

 1800 011 046

 openarms.gov.au

Open Arms provides support for current and ex-serving Australian Defence Force personnel, their partners, families, children with free, confidential counselling, group treatment programs including a community and peer network.

Headspace

 1800 650 890

 headspace.org.au

Headspace has centres located throughout Australia staffed with people who are trained and ready to help. They also provide eheadspace, a free online and telephone support and counselling service to young people 12-25 and their families and friends.

Children of Parents with a Mental Illness (COPMI)

 copmi.net.au

COPMI is an organisation promoting better outcomes for children and families where a parent experiences mental illness.

Educate2Empower Publishing

 e2epublishing.info

Educate2Empower Publishing produce free resources that combine illustrations with key educational concepts teaching children about their development and safety (My Body Safety Rules, My Early Warning Signs, Child Safe Organisation, Child Safe Home).

Health Promotion Agency and Skylight NZ – storybook for children dealing with family alcohol misuse

 [Ruby's Dad children's book with guidelines for schools
order.hpa.org.nz/products/ruby-s-dad-schools](http://order.hpa.org.nz/products/ruby-s-dad-schools)

 [Ruby's Dad children's book with guidelines for parents
order.hpa.org.nz/products/ruby-s-dad-parents](http://order.hpa.org.nz/products/ruby-s-dad-parents)

Ruby's Dad – is an illustrated book by Frances Rabone. This is a story for children aged 6-11 years whose parent or relative has a drinking problem.

Link2Home Homelessness and Link2Home Veterans & Ex-Service

 1800 152 152 (Link2Home Homelessness)

 sydneyhomelessconnect.com/services/link2home

 1800 326 989 (Link2Home Veterans & Ex-Service)

Link2home is the state-wide homelessness information and referral telephone service. They can assist if you are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

The information and referral telephone service is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

DCJ Housing Contact Centre

 1800 422 322

 dcj.nsw.gov.au

The Department of Communities and Justice Housing Contact Centre can provide guidance on what housing help you may be eligible for, including social housing, private rental assistance.

NSW Ministry of Health: Centre for Alcohol and other Drugs

 yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au/Pages/home.aspx

On Your Room, you can access:

- *[Facts on alcohol and other drugs and their effects](#)*
- *[Your Service Hub](#), an online directory*
- *[For Families](#) webpage for support*
- *[Resources that can help your teenagers and children feel safe](#)*
- *[Alcohol and other drug treatment services if your family member needs help](#)*

Mental Health

 health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/pages/default.aspx

On this webpage, you can find mental health services and programs for adults, children, teens and carers.

NSW Victims Access Line (VAL)

 1800 633 063

The Victims Access Line is the single entry point for victims of crime in New South Wales to access services. Victims Services may be able to assist you with free counselling and financial support if you are a victim of crime. The hours of operation are 8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday.

Staying Home Leaving Violence

 facs.nsw.gov.au/domestic-violence/services-and-support/programs/staying-home-leaving-violence

The program helps women and their children who live across 33 listed locations in NSW.

Staying Home Leaving Violence aims to prevent you and your children becoming homeless or moving away from your support system of family, friends, school and community where you live.

The program works with NSW Police to remove the perpetrator (the violent partner) from the family home so you and your children can stay safely. It provides a range of support, such as safety planning, improving home security, managing finances, support for children and helping you with the complicated legal process.

Providers of the program understand it's the violent person - your partner or ex-partner - who is responsible for their own abusive behaviour; committing a crime by hurting you / your children.

NSW Rape Crisis

 1800 424 017

Rape and Domestic Violence Services Australia provides counselling for people of all genders whose lives have been impacted by sexual assault. They provide telephone, online, and some face to face counselling. Their services are free and available (24 hours/7 days).

SANE Helpline

 1800 187 263



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