



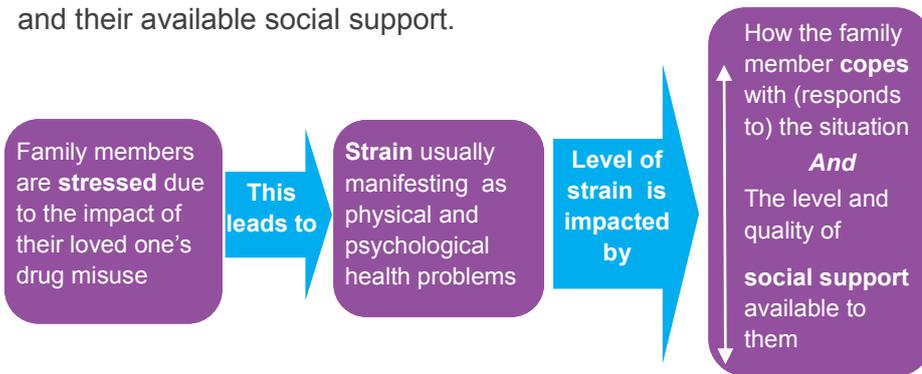
# Scottish Families

Affected by Alcohol & Drugs

## Coping: Ways of responding

### The Stress-Strain-Coping Model<sup>1</sup>

Living with and/or caring for a loved one misusing drugs is stressful. Stress levels can be influenced by how the family member is coping and their available social support.



Family members often try different ways of responding to their situation. There is no right or wrong way to cope. However, some forms of coping are more likely to reduce the strain, whereas others can increase it. Similarly, family members will have differing levels and quality of social support. Helpful support can contribute to reducing the stress and strain.

### Ways of coping

Research from the UK Alcohol, Drugs and the Family research group highlights three main coping approaches for family members living with and/or caring for a loved one misusing drugs. Some will focus on one of the approaches, where others will use a combination of two or all three approaches. It can be difficult for family members to know how best to deal with the situation.

The 3 ways of coping are:

- **Engaged** coping involves you trying to stop or reduce your relative's drug use and can include attempting to control their behaviour, being assertive and confronting the issue whilst trying to support them.
- **Tolerant** (or inactive) coping involves accepting your relative's drug use and protecting them from the negative consequences of their misuse, e.g. giving them money when you know they will spend it on drugs.
- **Withdrawal** coping involves putting some emotional/physical distance between the family member and the drug misuser.

**Family members are directly affected by a loved one's drug misuse.**

The impact on their lives can vary, but generally family members can become anxious or depressed. Constant worry can impact on their physical health. Sleep can be disturbed, or their appetite can be affected.

**All forms of coping may be linked to feelings of guilt and worry and a sense of powerlessness for the family member. There is no right or wrong way to cope and you need to find the best way for you and your situation.**

**Helpful support can positively impact on the stress and strain of living with and/or caring for someone misusing drugs.**

For information on available local support including family support groups, visit [www.sfad.org.uk/get-help-now](http://www.sfad.org.uk/get-help-now)

or contact our helpline on:

**08080 10 10 11**

[helpline@sfad.org.uk](mailto:helpline@sfad.org.uk)

<sup>1</sup>Stress-Strain-Coping-Support model (Orford, 1998)



## Coping: Ways of responding

The table below highlights the advantages and disadvantages of different ways of coping. All the ways of coping are valid and can have both positive and negative aspects. There is no right or wrong way to cope. Individuals adopt coping strategies which are effective for them and they often change or vary over time.

### Understand how you are coping

	Engaged coping	Tolerant coping	Withdrawal coping
Description	<b>Standing up to the problem:</b> Engaging in trying to change a loved one's drugs misuse in a variety of ways that may be emotional, assertive, controlling and/or supportive.	<b>Putting up with the problem:</b> Involves acceptance, however unhappy you may be about the situation. Accepting their drug misuse can encourage them not to take responsibility for their actions.	<b>Withdrawing from the problem &amp; gaining independence:</b> Attempting to put some distance between you and your loved one, in order to look after yourself.
Thoughts	<i>'I ought to be able to change them.'</i>	<i>'Other people do not understand them.'</i>	<i>'Things can't go on like this, I need to put myself first.'</i>
Feelings	Angry, hurt, responsible	Powerless, guilty	Defensive or hurt
Actions (examples)	Watching their every move; not giving them money when it may be spent on drugs; voicing frustrations and concerns that lead to arguments.	Giving them money even though you knew it would be spent on drugs; covering up evidence of their drug use.	Distancing yourself from them because of their drug use; limiting the amount of time spent with your loved one.
Possible Advantage	Helps you as you feel you are doing something positive.	Conflict can be avoided (sometimes for personal safety reasons).	May prevent you becoming over-involved.
Possible Disadvantage	Can cause stress by increased conflict in the relationship and a sense of resentment from your loved one.	Can feel that you are being taken advantage of and powerless.	May feel you are rejecting and/or excluding your loved one.

As highlighted there are different ways of responding to a situation and you may find the following exercise helpful. Note down an example of a difficult situation, how you responded, how you felt about your response, and how you could respond differently in the future

Difficult situation	How I responded	How I felt	Future response

Other sources of help and support can include attending a family support group, allowing you to hear how others are or have coped in similar situations. Visit [www.sfad.org.uk/get-help-now](http://www.sfad.org.uk/get-help-now)