

How alcohol and drugs can impact your work or education as a family member

If you are caring for your loved one, either voluntarily or involuntarily, having a 'normal' life such as going to work or school can be made more difficult.

You may end up not attending school, missing classes, and not being able to complete homework. Going to college or university may become more difficult if you live at home, and keeping up with your workloads whilst dealing with what's going on at home causes stress, anxiety, fear and anger.

Being able to go to work and finish a full shift may not be a reality for you as you are having to stop and care for your loved one.

Work

Juggling work, taking on caring responsibilities or looking after a loved one with an alcohol or drug problem can cause stress, unhappiness and difficulty in your life. Going to work causes fear for what might be waiting for you when you come home, or you may get a phone call from your loved one desperate for your care, and you need to leave your work to look after them. This can cause isolation and worry, especially if you are taking loads of calls from your loved one. You'll not be able to concentrate and you may even be too scared to go home.

If you are taking on caring responsibilities, you may feel too scared to tell your employer what's going on in your life in case they are not supportive and don't understand the situation. But some employers do understand what's going on and will be able to support you. This may be in the form of flexible hours of work.

Juggling these responsibilities is difficult and some people end up reducing their hours of work or working extra hours if any time is lost supporting a loved one.

If your loved one is working but is not able to go if they are under the influence, you may have extra responsibilities in contacting their employer and making excuses for why they're not at work. Their employment is their own personal responsibility and should not fall onto you. You should let the natural consequences take place.

If you become a carer to your loved one, you may be entitled to additional support from a Carers organisation including employment support.

A carer is someone of any age who provides unpaid support to family or friends who could not manage without this help. It is best to discuss with your local carer support service what help is available to you.

Support

Carers Scotland

Gives expert advice, information and support, connects carers so no one has to care alone, campaigns for lasting change and innovates to find new ways to reach and support carers. Carers Scotland are there to help carers and professionals, with expert advice on issues such as carers' benefits, community care and services for carers.



Education

Education is something most people are lucky enough to experience, whether we stop our educational journey after school, or continue on to college or university. For young people affected by someone else's substance use, your educational experience can be very different from your peers.

When your home life is chaotic and unpredictable, it can lead to feelings of anxiousness, depression and isolation. If you struggle to cope with school, it can become a barrier to accessing further education or employment in the future.

Difficulties in school can include:

- Erratic or complete non-attendance
- Difficulty with concentration (possibly due to lack of sleep from previous night's events or worrying about what you may return home to)
- No quiet space to complete homework/study at home
- Difficulty making friends
- Labelled as a 'difficult child' because you may mask your pain with aggressive behaviour

There is a lot of added responsibility on parents and carers when a child starts school. There is the financial burden of paying for the uniform, stationery, after-school clubs etc. as well as the pressure of getting a child up and ready for school on time, making sure they have done their homework, have their packed lunch ready; the list can seem endless.

If a young person doesn't have someone to support them with all these aspects of school, it can result in a huge amount of worry and fear. This is heightened by the feeling that all their friends and peers have support, structure and routine in their lives.

A young person may also take on extra caring responsibilities for younger siblings whilst also trying to focus on their own education. Keeping on top of everything at home and school while not being able to tell anyone can have a lasting and detrimental impact on them.

Some young people feel isolated when they're at school, university or college but are also afraid of returning home as they are unsure of what will face them when they walk through the door. It's a constant vicious circle of having nowhere safe to retreat to and feeling on edge all the time.

For young people living with this kind of stress, understandably only a few make it to further education. If they can afford it, some move into student halls but may feel guilty about leaving their parent or younger siblings behind. The ones who remain at home are often disrupted while trying to write essays and study for exams, which can impact their results.

Due to the stigma of addiction, young people are usually reluctant to talk about the issues at home or seek help for themselves.

It's hard when you have a parent or carer who is unable to look after you because they're under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. You have different life experiences to others due to a lack of control, routine, structure and nurture. Every young person deserves the chance to succeed at school and further education and to have access to support that helps them find the right path for themselves.

Most schools, colleges and universities have a wellbeing system where support is offered to students. Of course, not every support service is suitable for each student so we recommend you keep searching until you find the right one for you.