

Why Families Need Support



**Scottish
Families**

Affected by Alcohol & Drugs

About Scottish Families

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Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs (Scottish Families) is a national charity which supports anyone concerned about someone else's alcohol or drug use in Scotland. We were established in 2003 by family members themselves, who came together to support each other and to campaign for recognition.

We provide both national and local services. Each year we support family members from all of Scotland's 32 council areas, and from all walks of life. We know there is no single 'type' of family affected by substance use. You can find out more about our work at www.sfad.org.uk, including [About Us](#), [How We are Funded](#), our [Support Services](#), our latest [Impact Report](#) and more.

What Makes You Family?

When we say 'family', we mean who you see as your family. It could be your partner, your parent, your child or grandchild, your sibling, your friend, your colleagues, your neighbours, and anyone we may have missed. Our love and care for each other makes us family.

Family members taking part in our [Ask the Family](#) project (2021) found that an average of 11 people were harmed for each person using alcohol or drugs, across every single type of family relationship (including children, young people and adults) and all social networks (including friends, neighbours and work colleagues).

We Love Families!

Families are at the heart of everything we do at Scottish Families. Our relationship-based practice with families focuses on trust, respect, compassion and time.

We know that families affected by someone else's substance use are often unsupported, excluded, isolated and judged by others. Many do not feel able to talk to anyone about what is going on, due to the secrecy, shame and stigma of alcohol and drug harm in families.

Our [Ask the Family](#) project (2021) found that on average family members had been harmed by alcohol or drug use for 16 years, but it had taken them 8 years to reach family support for the first time.

We recognise and respect families' strengths, experience and expertise. Together we develop knowledge, skills, confidence, self-care and connections.

My Family, My Rights

We use a rights-based framework which recognises that family members have the right to health, the right to a life free from the harms of alcohol and drugs, and the right to family life.

As families and carers, they have the right to be supported in their own right, and to be included in their loved one's treatment and care. They also have the right to be active partners in decisions which affect them, and for their views to be heard.

We know that families' rights are rarely recognised or upheld by others. Our role includes supporting them to recognise and access their rights as family members and carers, and to effectively advocate for themselves and their loved ones.

Family Support: What Is It and Why Is It Needed?



Our team member has put together the above video, talking through family support and why it is needed. The video can be viewed by clicking the image above or by [visiting this link](#).

We know that on average it takes a family member 8 years to come forward for support and that for every one person who uses alcohol or drugs, 11 people are impacted.

When we first start to get to know family members, they have so much to tell us, so much that they want us to understand, so much that they want to offload. Often talking to us will be the first time they have spoken to anyone outside of their immediate family about what they have been experiencing, they may not even have spoken to close family or friends.

We meet each family member where they are and work with them at their own pace, we don't have an agenda set for them. We know that family members can make long term change that will benefit them, their loved one, their wider family and their communities.

But they are often exhausted, demoralised, frightened and sad.

Our role is to re-energise and encourage them to discover the skills they have and to help them to see that they can be empowered to make choices and move forward in a positive way.

We achieve this by focussing on interventions that -

- Uphold our understanding that families prevent and reduce harm and risk
- Are backed by evidence
- Relationship-based
- Trauma-informed

Support comes in a range of different sizes, across the local family support services we offer-

- One-to-One Support
- Group Support
- CRAFT (Community Reinforcement Approach & Family Training)
- Creative Coping Activities
- Writing and Book Groups
- Opportunities to get Oot & Aboot
- Connect, Learn & Share Sessions
- Access to holistic therapies like Reiki, Meditation, Yoga, Tai-Chi, Cold Water Swimming
- Access to Naloxone
- Support to Access Bereavement Counselling

In One-to-One Support, we give family members a confidential space to talk about the impact of supporting their loved one. We guide them to explore the issues affecting them, encourage them to express their thoughts and feelings, and help them to come up with ideas and solutions to move forward. Common topics include improving communication, setting boundaries and self-care.

Our group support sessions are open to anyone 16+ affected by someone else's substance use.

Most family member's are anxious about joining a group and often will say- "I'll come but I probably won't say very much." That is rarely the case. Sharing experiences with others that really 'get it' and are willing to share what they have experienced can bring a sense of relief to family members, make them feel less isolated, and help them to find a more proactive way to cope with their situation.

At Scottish Families, we love using CRAFT (Community Reinforcement Approach & Family Training).

CRAFT is a set of 7 structured sessions and is a solution-focused, skills-based programme with a strong evidence base. It involves roleplays to help family members practice new skills and has small assignments and tasks which they are asked to do away from the sessions.

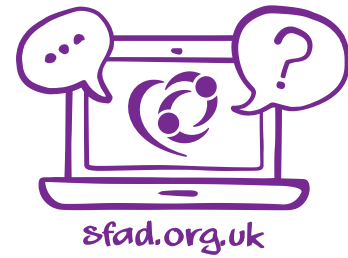
We encourage family member's to consider creative coping and Oot and Aboot activities in order to nurture their creative spirit; enable them to discover activities that interest, challenge and distract them; activities that can help them understand themselves and their world in new ways; and activities that can help them forget about their concerns for a time.

Connect, Learn and Share' sessions take place via zoom and are information based sessions - bringing in current events, topics and guest speakers.

Since 2020 we have been able to provide naloxone directly to anyone living in Scotland who is over the age of 16 through our 'Click & Deliver' take-home naloxone service.

Sadly, not every family member's loved one is able to find recovery and if they have lost someone who used alcohol or drugs, our bereavement service is here to support them. We will chat and offer advice and information and we can also put them in touch with an accredited counsellor who is local to them. Our service is free and is available across Scotland.

Family Inclusive Practice



Including Families

Including families has been a central theme of Scotland's strategy for reducing drug and alcohol harms for several years.

It is featured in the **'Quality Principles'** (2014), which states **"Services should be family inclusive as part of their practice."**

The strategy document **'Rights, Respect & Recovery'** (2018) states that services should **"Ensure all families will have access to support in their own right and, where appropriate, will be included in their loved one's treatment and support."**

And there are repeated references to family inclusion in the **MAT (Medication Assisted Treatment) Standards** (2021), and the **National Mission on Drug Deaths Plan** (2022), which asserts that **"Family members are empowered to support their loved one's recovery."**

What is Family Inclusive Practice?

So then, what is family inclusive practice? At Scottish Families we use this definition, that Family Inclusive Practice:

- Involves significant members of an individual's social context in assessment and care planning. The overall purpose of inclusive practice is better, more sustained outcomes for both the individual and members of their social environment which are often their family.
- Values families and recognises families have needs in their own right.
- Seeks to include families in the scope of the work even though the main focus of the intervention may be an individual within a family.

Surprisingly, there is no agreed upon national definition of Family Inclusive Practice. Similar terms, such as 'Whole Family Approach', or 'Whole Family Recovery', have common principles underpinning them.

The document, **'A Rapid Review of the Literature on Whole Family Approach'** (2023) helps us understand some of those key principles:

- Working collaboratively with families as a unit and as individuals to identify their collective and respective needs.
- Providing timely and flexible support.
- Taking a holistic approach by considering substance use within its wider context and addressing associated needs.
- Reinforcing existing relationships and making use of individual strengths.
- Addressing stigma and other barriers to services.

- How families are defined and understood is crucial.
- The wider context in which substance use occurs and its driving factors (e.g., poverty, trauma) needs to be considered and addressed.

Good Practice

The document '**A Framework for Holistic Whole Family Approaches and Family Inclusive Practice**' (2021) sets out that **"A trauma informed, compassionate, skilled and valued workforce who are family inclusive and able to increase feelings of safety and trust with families."**

Good practice contains some of the following factors:

- Involving all members of families affected by substance use [...] is associated with positive outcomes.
- Long term, consistent and timely support and good therapeutic relationships are associated with an increased likelihood of positive outcomes.
- Interventions that adopt a holistic approach to substance use, acknowledging and responding to the range of needs experienced by families are associated with positive outcomes.
- Peer support within family inclusive interventions, e.g., engaging in peer discussions, has a positive effect on substance use outcomes, and other outcomes.

Family Inclusive Practice

Policy then, is clear – families should be included.

However, families still tell us a different story, one of being "welcome-ish" at best and excluded at worst.

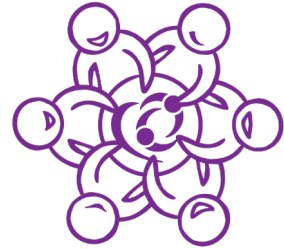
While there are examples of good practice, it is also clear there is still a significant implementation gap. This will require challenging attitudes and stigma, skills training, collaboration, and structural and ideological change within services.

In response, we will be rolling out our new Family Inclusive Practice Development Programme to services across Scotland, and Scottish Families will continue to collaborate with families across Scotland to make sure their voices are heard.



'I don't know how I would have got through the last few months without your support. Speaking to you feels like a warm blanket, I always feel so much stronger.' – Family member

Supporting yourself when caring for someone



We have taken this information that is available through [Mind](#) as it is very informative and detailed for families affected by someone else's alcohol or drug use.

Your mental health as a carer

It can help to understand common challenges that many unpaid carers encounter, as this might make you feel less alone. We explain some feelings you might experience while caring for someone, and how these can impact your mental health.

Positive experiences of caring for someone

It can be a very positive and rewarding experience to know you are helping someone else.

Some carers feel they've learnt more about their own strengths, or have helped others understand their condition, problem or disability. You might feel a sense of satisfaction from making a real difference to the life of the person you care for.

Through your experience of supporting someone else, you may feel:

- more confident in dealing with other people
- more understanding of others with problems
- closer to friends and family.

Difficult feelings and your mental health

Supporting someone else can affect your mental health and make it harder to stay well. Although you may truly want to care for them, you may also find it difficult and upsetting.

When caring for someone else, you might experience challenges and difficult feelings such as:

- **Stress and worry.** If you spend a lot of time thinking about their health and what will happen in the future, it may feel hard for you to switch off. Over a long time, worry and stress can cause mental health problems. It can also make existing problems worse.
- **Anxiety.** Many carers say that they feel a constant anxiety about the person they care for. If your feelings of anxiety are strong or last for a very long time, they can become overwhelming. They may impact your ability to live your life as fully as you want to.
- **Isolation and loneliness.** You might have less time to socialise or pursue hobbies and interests. If you've given up work, you may not see the people you used to and you might not feel as close to the person you look after. It can feel hard to ask for help or to let people know you are a carer and why.

Your life can sometimes feel very different and it can seem like others don't understand. Over time, you might start to feel lonely. Social isolation can lead to mental health problems like depression.

- **Less time for yourself.** You probably have less time to look after yourself, for example to be physically active, eat healthy food and relax. You may feel as though your health doesn't take priority, or you don't have time to get the help you need.
- **Money worries.** You may have to pay for extra care, medical or travel costs. This can put a strain on your finances, especially if you're not getting enough financial support or benefits. You may have to cut down on work, or juggle work and caring, which can be difficult.
- **Lack of sleep.** If you support someone who needs help at night – or you're very worried and stressed – you may not get as much sleep as you need. Not getting enough sleep can impact your mental health.
- **Guilt, frustration and anger.** You may feel frustrated if you've given up parts of your own life, or feel you have no choice about the situation. You might end up directing this anger at family or the person you care for, which could make you feel guilty.
- **Low self-esteem.** Looking after someone else can have a big impact on your self-esteem. You might feel that you should focus all your time on them. You might lose confidence in yourself and your abilities to do anything except supporting someone else. If you have given up work, you may feel that you have lost an important part of yourself.
- **Depression.** You may find that the challenges you face when looking after someone else can make you feel low or depressed. You might develop unhelpful coping strategies to deal with difficult feelings. For example using drugs or alcohol, or eating more or less than you need to. If you feel very frustrated or hopeless, you may have thoughts of harming yourself or ending your life.



sfad.org.uk

‘This group has been a lifesaver for me, as I was feeling exceptionally low. I can share my feelings without judgement in a safe and empathic space. Everyone has been so welcoming and understanding, particularly in my early days of daily ‘breakdowns’. I have been to the gym twice this week, I was not going out the front door prior to this group, I don’t feel so alone so thank you all.’ – Family Member

Additional Resources

Scottish Families Materials

- 'Little Book of CRAFT' - Community Reinforcement and Family Training Booklet
- Sudden and Unexplained Deaths
- Understanding Substance Use - How Do People Change?
- Coping Skills - Managing Emotions
- Coping Skills - Ways of Responding
- How alcohol and drugs can affect your education as a family member
- How alcohol and drugs can affect your finances as a family member
- Behind the Numbers - storytelling campaign for drug-related death statistics
- Rewriting the Media - research on Scottish media reporting on substances
- Hour by Hour with Holding On - storytelling campaign
- Constantly Just Holding It Up and Together - research project on family support
- Ask the Family! - family perspectives on whole family approaches and family inclusive practice
- 'There's Only So Much One Person Can Do' - a deep dive of family support in Scotland
- Reporting of Substance Media Toolkit
- 'Here's to Us' - Alcohol and Friendships
- 'Your Stories' - family story section on the Scottish Families website

Life with Alcohol and Drugs

Life with Alcohol and Drugs is a podcast from the charity Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs. Our podcast features guest speakers and topics concerning life with alcohol and drugs and offers support and advice to anyone who needs it.

You can listen to all our episodes here.

Scottish Families Support Services

- National Helpline
- Bereavement Support
- Inverclyde Family Support Service
- Forth Valley Family Support Service
- Fife Family Support Service
- East Dunbartonshire Family Support Service
- Aberdeenshire Family Support Service
- Routes Young Person's Programme
- Men's Group
- One to One Support
- Take-Home Naloxone
- The Book Group
- The Family Recovery College
- Love Makes You Family
- The Alcohol Action Group
- The Family Recovery Initiative Fund



Scottish Families

Affected by Alcohol & Drugs

Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs

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