

Challenging the stigma around alcohol

For everyone



Family members of people who drink harmfully often find themselves defined by their loved one's drinking. This doesn't just apply to parents: children, siblings and partners can also feel heavily stigmatised (which means heavily disapproved of, or treated unfairly).

Stigmatisation can come from the way harmful drinking is talked about in the media or by friends, neighbours, colleagues or even relatives. It is often hard for families to avoid feeling stigmatised, whether they support their loved one closely or are completely distanced from them.

Day-to-day impact

Stigma experienced by family members of people who drink harmfully can dramatically alter their day-to-day lives: social invitations can dry up, children may be targeted by bullies, friends and family may become less trusting around money, or work colleagues might make inappropriate comments.

Internalising stigma

Families of people who drink harmfully can experience high levels of guilt and self-blame; particularly parents who believe that the upbringing they provided is responsible for the substance misuse. As a result, some families can internalise stigma through feelings of guilt and low self-worth.

Bereavement

Families who experience an alcohol-related bereavement may experience stigma due to a combination of the alcohol use, guilt and shame over the relationship and the particular circumstances of the death.



“People not supporting you makes it worse. You think it's something you did, you feel like a bit of a failure, like it's something to do with you.”

#AAW2017

Alcohol
Concern



ALCOHOL
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Reduced access to support

Families often struggle to express themselves regarding their loved one's drinking due to fear of stigma and a concern that they won't be properly understood. They can feel abandoned by their friends and relations, sometimes as a result of their continued support for their loved one, and find themselves isolated.

But families of those struggling with alcohol need support; harmful drinking can have a potentially devastating impact on families. Some of the behaviours associated with harmful drinking can cause intense stress – for example domestic abuse, child abuse, individuals driving under the influence or disappearing for days at a time.

Fighting stigma

The best way to combat stigma is to talk openly about the issues surrounding alcohol. Families who don't feel stigmatised are more likely to seek support for their own needs, and more able to take an active role in their loved one's recovery if they choose to do so.

To help fight stigma, you can:

- Help highlight the damaging nature of stigma and discrimination on the families of people who drink harmfully by talking about it openly
- Learn and then educate others about the nature, causes and consequences of harmful drinking
- Draw the attention of local authorities and government to the impact of stigma on families so they can support services that work with the whole family
- As employers, local businesses, neighbours and friends, support people and families we know who are struggling with addiction, and help them get support to improve their lives

“I'm labelled with a big invisible sign that I can't see but others can.”



How do you know if someone is drinking harmfully?

If you are worried about your drinking or that of someone you know, you should talk to someone about it. The first place to start might be your GP, or the organisations listed below. Someone might need help if:

- They are unable to control the amount they drink
- Their behaviour changes because of their drinking
- Their drinking is causing problems in everyday life

Further support

- If you think you and/or someone you know may be drinking too much, contact **Drinkline** (England) on **0300 123 1110** or **Dan24/7** (Wales) on **0808 808 2234**
- **Al-Anon** family groups provide support to anyone whose life is, or has been, affected by someone else's drinking, regardless of whether that person is still drinking or not. Visit al-anonuk.org.uk
- You can find more support services through **Adfam**. Visit adfam.org.uk
- To read our other factsheets about alcohol and families visit alcoholconcern.org.uk/alcohol-awareness-week