



Carers  
in Hertfordshire



*Help for people affected  
by someone else's drinking*

*Making  
Carers Count*



[www.carersinherts.org.uk](http://www.carersinherts.org.uk)

## *Foreword*

This booklet has been produced for people who are affected by someone else's drinking. It may be a family member – partner, parent, child or brother or sister – or it may be a close friend; but if it is making life difficult or unpleasant for you, we hope you'll find some useful advice in the following pages.

## *About us*

Carers in Hertfordshire recognises the impact on your life of the alcohol misuse of someone close to you and can support you in a number of ways. We can provide you with opportunities to have a real say in how services are offered and provided to both you and your relative or friend. We can inform you of your rights as a carer and can refer you to the appropriate agency for a Carers Assessment if you wish. We can provide you with information about a wide range of issues affecting carers, from how to make sure you are receiving the benefits you are entitled to, to how to get a break from your caring role. We can also put you in touch with people with similar experiences.

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## *Identifying a problem:*

### **How to tell if someone's drinking is at a worrying level**

Alcohol, unlike certain other drugs is legal. It is a normal part of social life and many people enjoy a drink without problems arising.

There is guide on safe drinking for health (see Units Appendix A) but alcohol can affect people badly in other ways. These include their behaviour towards family members and friends, their attitude to authority, their way of managing (or not managing) work-life, finances and social life

Very often, people start to be concerned about someone else's drinking because of a change in their behaviour. This may be:

- Showing aggression, becoming angry easily over small things
- Being very concerned about getting their next drink, and planning events around it
- Forgetting or neglecting other things in their life

Sometimes these signs have been in evidence for a while but the family or friends of the drinker have ignored it or excused it. Often it takes a crisis to force the issue out into the open.

However, there may be many other reasons for why this person is behaving like this, so you do need to talk to them about what is happening and why.

### **Things to bear in mind when you're talking:**

- Choose the right moment to talk – when they're sober – and you are both reasonably calm
- Don't jump to conclusions
- Get the facts
- Find out about the problem
- Show concern
- Explain how you feel about the situation and how their drinking is affecting you and other family members or friends
- Try to keep communications open
- These are useful things to remember if you're talking to family members and others who may be affected by the drinker's behaviour.

## *Understanding the problem - finding out more*

### **Why do people drink too much?**

There are many reasons why people drink heavily: some do it to help them cope with everyday life, to give them confidence and help them relax. Some do it to forget pain or problems they can't cope with. Often people start to drink heavily after a bereavement, when they have lost someone important to them.

Some people will say they drink because they like the taste or that all their friends drink. Sometimes people with mental health problems will "self-medicate" on alcohol, in other words, try to use alcohol as medicine

Whatever the reason, they can get help if they are prepared to. The one thing that is certain is that, unless they are prepared to tackle the problem themselves, there is nothing anyone else can do for them

Of course, you will want to help a family member or close friends with a drinking problem and there are places you can find more information and sources of help (see Appendix B). But this booklet is not chiefly concerned with the drinker's problem but with the problems of those around him or her who are affected.

### **How does it affect others?**

People who are affected by someone else's drinking report that the drinker dominates the family; everything is focussed on them, and the rest of the family will often conspire to protect the drinker or conceal the problem

Some people become aggressive or violent when they drink too much and this can be frightening for people around. They may have good reason to be frightened as alcohol is often a factor in domestic abuse. Family members may become ill through stress. It can affect their everyday life, causing shame, hurt and anger.

There may be financial problems if a lot of money is being spent on drink, and, if mortgage or rent payments and other bills are not being paid, it could mean that the family home might be lost and the family made homeless.

This may be especially the case if the drinker's behaviour puts his or her job at risk. Often the most painful effect of someone in the family drinking too much is the sense that the person has changed and is no longer the loved one. The drinker can become cut off from the family living and social networks, forget or ignore birthdays etc, or not be invited to events and cause pain and hurt to those around.

Because of the stigma attached to alcohol problems, those affected often try to hide it. They may be reluctant to talk to others about it and so cut themselves off from sources of help.

## *Tackling the problem:*

### **Getting help for the drinker: How you can help the person deal with their drinking; where they can get help or treatment**

When family members or friends are affected by someone else's drinking, their first thought is often to get help for the drinker, to believe that their only thing they can do to help themselves is to get the drinker into treatment or support to tackle the problem

This can work if the drinker is ready to acknowledge there is a problem and willing to get help. Appendix B shows a list of useful contacts in Hertfordshire

Unfortunately, it is often the case that the drinker does not see that he or she has a drink problem, and so will refuse help and may become angry at being "labelled".

### **What can you do if the drinker won't acknowledge the problem and/or doesn't want to change?**

Ultimately, the family member or friend has to accept that they can't change the situation for the drinker or force a solution to a problem that the drinker won't admit. At this point the family member or friend has to think of what they can do to help themselves.

It does not have to be a choice between showing concern for the drinking and attending to your needs, but you need to realise you can only control your own life.

## *ways of helping yourself*

### **Getting help for yourself: acknowledging that you can't change other people, only yourself**

- Accept that you can't change someone else's behaviour and look for ways of improving the situation for yourself and others affected
- Understand that you are not the only person in this position. There are thousands of people, feeling as you do, and believing they are alone
- Acknowledge that you need help and deserve it. You are not to blame for someone else's behaviour. You are entitled to get help
- Get support – there are groups and agencies that help you – see Appendix B
- Get on with your life and don't allow yourself to be an accessory to someone else's life. You may find that you actually help the drinker by moving on and not allowing him or her to draw you into their dependence
- If there are other people in the family or social circle who are affected as you are, talk to them to offer support and get support from them. Talk about how you can work together to manage the problem. It will help if you take the same approach, especially when it comes to putting boundaries in place – see below.

### **Putting boundaries in place**

- Decide what you need to do to stop the drinker's lifestyle damaging your health and happiness:
- This may be separating your finances from the drinker's, explaining to him or her that you will not give them money for alcohol – and stick to this, however, hard it may be:
- Making an agreement with yourself that you will not react to the drinker's remarks or behaviour and planning ways of "tuning out" anything that will draw you into the drinker's problems
- Tell the drinker what behaviour you will not accept – for example, if it is a son or daughter, you may tell them that you will not allow them to come to the house when they have been drinking or are drunk.

## Protecting yourself

We talked earlier about the tendency of some people to become aggressive or violent after drinking. If this is the case in your situation, you need to plan how you will protect yourself. If the drinker does not live in your house, you may decide to take back the door-key and lock the door if you feel threatened. If it is someone who lives in the house, you may want to arrange somewhere you can go to be safe – this may be the house of a friend or a relative. If you think you may not be safe you can keep vital items (such as passport, money, basic clothing) in a bag, to help you get away from the house in an emergency. You can see the sources of help in Appendix B for other options.

## Protecting other family members

If there other vulnerable people in the house, especially children, you will need to include them in your plans.

## Living your own life

- Remind yourself that you are a human being with rights, which include the right to live in peace and safety, and the right to try and be happy
- You are not responsible for what the drinker is doing. Sometimes people who are drinking heavily try to blame others and say things like “it’s your fault, you nag me, you make me feel bad and get angry with me”. In the case of a parent who is drinking heavily, they may blame the son or daughter, saying things like, “I’ve devoted my life to you!”. Tell yourself that adults must take responsibility for their own actions – that is part of what we mean by “adult”.
- Make a space to think of things you like to do, that make you happy, and plan to include them in your routine. These may be very small, simple things like walking round the garden or a park, talking to a friend, reading a book or watching a television programme. Or they may be bigger things like following a hobby or going to visit someone who lives at a distance. It is important to hold onto your sense of who you are

## change

### **What happens if the alcohol user changes his or her behaviour?**

When you are affected by someone else's drinking, you think that if only they would stop, everything would be all right again. Earlier, we talked about the fact that you can't control the drinker, only yourself while all this is going on.

But sometimes people find that when the event they wished for happens, it isn't as easy as they expect. If the situation has gone on for a long time, you'll have found your own ways of dealing with things. You may have taken over responsibility for running the family, the home, finances. Once the drinker starts to recover, he or she will want to take back a role in the family or social circle. You may struggle to let them back in; part of you may feel resentful that you have had to struggle alone and now the one who caused the problem wants to act as if nothing has happened; part of you may feel anxious and find it hard to trust the person again.

It will be easier for you if you managed to get support for yourself and work your way through some of these feelings, and you will continue to want support to deal with the new situation. Why not look at the list of places you can get support see Appendix B and see if there is help offered that you've not taken up.

You will also have to deal with your anxiety that the ex-drinker will relapse; in fact, he or she may well do so a few times before making a full recovery. People who are trying to get over their dependence on alcohol often have to make a number of attempts. This can be disappointing for their family and friends. But if this happens, don't be too discouraged; sometimes people can get back on track quite quickly after they've relapsed. Again, you'll be able to cope with this much better if you are getting support and are able to see yourself as a person in your own right.

It may be that the relationship will be different to what it was before the problems started. Both you and the drinker will have come through a lot and you will be different people. Being part of a group, having others to share problems with, will help you deal with these changes.

## **What happens if the drinker doesn't change?**

If you have been through all pain and problems of living with or being closely involved with a drinker and realise that they are prepared or able to change their behaviour, you have to make a difficult choice: either to stay with them or to acknowledge that your only chance of peace and happiness is to make a life that doesn't include the drinker.

If you decide to stay, make sure you get all the support you can. If you feel you cannot go on like this, you will need to think of parting. This can be a hard decision so you need to get help to support you through the decision and the outcome. If you're under 18, it may seem especially hard, but there are people and organisations that can help you. (see Appendix B)

## *Emergencies*

### **What to do in an emergency**

#### **Medical help**

If the drinker shows signs of being seriously ill – e.g. becomes unconscious, has fits or hallucinates, call your GP or an ambulance immediately.

#### **Threat to safety**

If you are at risk of violence, get away to safety, taking any vulnerable family members with you. Be prepared to call the police if necessary

#### **Threat to children**

If you think that children are at risk when someone is drinking heavily, you can call the NSPCC or social services or the police.

## Units

Alcohol is measured in units. The following drinks contain 1 unit of alcohol

|                      |   |  |
|----------------------|---|--|
| <b>Beer</b>          | 1/2 pint ordinary strength              | Extra strength may be double the units                   |
| <b>Wine (9% abv)</b> | 1 125ml glass (small pub measure glass) | Wine may be as much as 14% abv which is far higher units |
| <b>Sherry</b>        | 1 glass (small pub measure glass)       |  |
| <b>Spirits</b>       | 25 mls                                  | 1 pub measure  |

The recommended daily limits are:

- For men – no more than 3–4 units
- For women – no more than 2–3 units

It is recommended that both men and women should have one or two alcohol free days a week to allow the liver to recover.

## Other sources of help

### Information

| Agency          | Tel/email/website  | Form of help   |
|-----------------|--|--|
| Adfam           | <a href="http://www.adfam.org.uk">www.adfam.org.uk</a><br>020 7553 7640  | <p>The Adfam mission is to improve the quality of life for families affected by drug and alcohol use. Find out how we are achieving this here.</p> <p>Adfam is the only national umbrella organisation working specifically with and for families affected by drugs and alcohol. Our final goal is that no family member in need of support should go without it.</p> <p>As well as providing support materials and training specifically for families and professionals, Adfam informs policy development and campaigns both locally and nationally for improved family support services.</p> |
| Alcohol Concern | <a href="http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk">www.alcoholconcern.org.uk</a> | Information and advice around alcohol  |
| Drinkaware      | <a href="http://www.drinkaware.co.uk">www.drinkaware.co.uk</a>           | Information on making informed decisions about the effects of alcohol on their lives and lifestyles.   |

### For the drinker

| Agency               | Tel/email/website  | Form of help                   |
|----------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| Alcoholics Anonymous | <a href="http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk">www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk</a><br>0845 769 7555<br>help@alcoholic-anonymous.org.uk | Recovery programme and support |

## For the drinker

| Agency   | Tel/email/website   | Form of help   |
|--|---|--|
| Drinkline  | 0300 123 1110   | Offers information and self-help materials:<br>Help to callers worried about their own drinking:<br>Support to the family and friends of people who are drinking:<br>Advice to callers on where to go for help   |
| Spectrum Drug and Alcohol Recovery Service Hertfordshire | <a href="http://www.cri.org.uk">www.cri.org.uk</a><br>0800 652 3169   | Works with people over 18 who would like to access support for their drug or alcohol use.<br>Offers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counselling</li> <li>• Rehabilitation support</li> <li>• Recommendations to community groups and services</li> <li>• Support from a peer mentor, a fellow service user who is at an advanced stage of their recovery journey</li> <li>• Joint working with mental health services to ensure appropriate support</li> <li>• Links with local colleges and employers to identify training, education and employment opportunities</li> </ul> |
| FOCUS  | Lois Harris<br>01442 211687<br>(24 hour answering service, someone will return your call as soon as possible) | Offers counselling specialising in addiction issues, auricular acupuncture, support and advice   |

|                   |  |  |
|-------------------|--|--|
| Action for change | <a href="http://www.action-for-change.org">www.action-for-change.org</a><br>0300 111 2470<br>info@action-for-change.org  | If you live in Hertfordshire and are experiencing difficulty with alcohol you are entitled to 12 free telephone alcohol related counselling sessions |
| The Living Room   | <a href="http://www.thelivingroom.me.uk">www.thelivingroom.me.uk</a><br>01438 355649 – Stevenage<br>01727 854479 – St Albans<br>Located in Stevenage and St Albans accepts clients from across the county and beyond | Provides structured daily group therapy and one to one counselling and support for people with a whole range of addictions.                          |

### For the family member/friend/carer

| Agency                          | Tel/email/website  |  |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Al-Anon                         | <a href="http://www.al-anonuk.org.uk">www.al-anonuk.org.uk</a><br>020 7378 0888  | Advice, information and peer support   |
| Parental Drug Awareness Service | 01707 393934   | Information, counselling, family therapy, drug awareness presentations and workshops |
| The Living Room                 | <a href="http://www.thelivingroom.me.uk">www.thelivingroom.me.uk</a><br>01438 355649 – Stevenage<br>01727 854479 – St Albans | Support group and family and couple counselling                                      |

|  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| Spectrum Drug and Alcohol Recovery Service Hertfordshire | <a href="http://www.cri.org.uk">www.cri.org.uk</a><br>0800 652 3169   | Family and Carer Groups to support those affected by the drug or alcohol use of somebody else<br>Carers Assessment, goal planning, access to Carers Grant and signposting/referral to other services |
| Action for change  | <a href="http://www.action-for-change.org">www.action-for-change.org</a><br>0300 111 2470<br>info@action-for-change.org | if you live in Hertfordshire and know someone who is experiencing difficulties with alcohol you are entitled to 12 free telephone alcohol related counselling sessions                               |
| FOCUS  | Lois Harris<br>01442 211687<br>(24 hour answering service, someone will return your call as soon as possible)           | Offers counselling specialising in addiction issues, auricular acupuncture, support and advice   |

|                  |  |  |
|------------------|--|--|
| <p>HertSpeak</p> | <p><a href="http://www.wdp-drugs.org.uk/pages/hertspeak.html">http://www.wdp-drugs.org.uk/pages/hertspeak.html</a></p> <p>01462 442442</p> | <p>Services include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family therapy sessions: facilitated by our Family Therapist to explore communication, family relationships and family breakdown.</li> <li>• One-to-one therapy sessions: talk-based therapy and/or practical support to help them deal with the impact of parental drug and alcohol use.</li> <li>• Couples sessions: for adults who have a shared responsibility for the care of a child, to help them prioritise the needs of the children and explore relationship issues.</li> <li>• Parenting one-to-one: to enhance parenting skills and offer practical and emotional support with parenting.</li> <li>• Therapeutic play: a space for children to work through their thoughts and feelings through the medium of play.</li> </ul> |
|------------------|--|--|

|             |  |  |
|-------------|--|--|
|             |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parenting groups: regular Positive Parenting Groups which help parents in similar situations to support each other and discuss practical techniques.</li> <li>• Play coaching: supporting the parent to develop play techniques and introduce special time with the child to strengthen the bond</li> </ul> |
| Shelter     | 0808 800 4444 (National Helpline)<br><a href="http://www.shelter.org.uk">www.shelter.org.uk</a>                                | Shelter provides free, confidential, impartial housing, debt and welfare benefits advice to those on low incomes or income based benefits.<br><br>We hold a Legal Service Commission Specialist Quality Mark in Housing, Debt and Welfare Benefits.  |
| Women's Aid | <a href="http://www.womensaid.org.uk">www.womensaid.org.uk</a><br>24 Hour National Domestic Violence Helpline<br>0808 2000 247 | Supports a network of over 500 domestic and sexual violence services across the UK.  |

| <b>St Albans and Hertsmere Women's Refuge</b> |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <b>Outreach:</b>                              | Telephone: 01727 827621  | Opening Times:<br>Mon–Fri 9.30am–4.30pm |
| <b>Refuge:</b>                                | Telephone: 01923 855662  | Opening Times:<br>Mon–Fri 9.30am–4.30pm |
| <b>Refuge:</b>                                | Telephone: 01727 824425  | Opening Times:<br>Mon–Fri 9.30am–4.30pm |
| <b>Stevenage Women's Refuge</b>               |  |   |
| <b>Refuge:</b>                                | Fax: 01438 350243*   | Opening Times:<br>Mon–Fri 9.30am–5pm    |
| <b>Refuge and advice line:</b>                | Telephone: 01438 350243  | Opening Times:<br>Mon–Fri 9.30am–5pm    |
| <b>The Sunflower Centre - Hertfordshire</b>   |  |   |
| <b>IDVA</b><br><i>Rickmansworth:</i>          | Telephone: 01923 727231<br>Email: <a href="mailto:sunflowerherts@googlemail.com">sunflowerherts@googlemail.com</a> | Opening Times:<br>Mon–Fri 8am–4pm       |
| <b>IDVA Hemel Hempstead:</b>                  | Telephone: 01442 270679<br>Email: <a href="mailto:sunflowerherts@googlemail.com">sunflowerherts@googlemail.com</a> | Opening Times:<br>Mon–Fri 8am–4pm       |
| <b>IDVA Watford:</b>                          | Telephone: 01923 215180<br>Email: <a href="mailto:sunflowerherts@googlemail.com">sunflowerherts@googlemail.com</a> | Opening Times:<br>Mon–Fri 8am–4pm       |
| <b>Welwyn Hatfield Women's Refuge</b>         |  |   |
| <b>Refuge and information line:</b>           | Telephone: 01707 373743  | Opening Times:<br>Mon–Fri 9am–5pm       |
| <b>Refuge and outreach:</b>                   | Fax: 01707 375530  | Opening Times:<br>Mon–Fri 9am–5pm       |

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