How Are Friends and Family Members Affected?: Before we discuss the signs and symptoms of alcohol and drug use, we need to talk about how you have been affected by the alcohol and drug use of your family member or friend. Your ability to be helpful depends on how much you understand about alcohol and drugs as well as how you have been affected by their alcohol and drug use.

In fact, **the most important thing you can do** to help your friend or family member, is to commit to getting help and support for yourself!

To better understand how you have been affected, and find out if you need some help, answer these questions:

- Alcohol: Are You Troubled by Someone's Drinking?
- Drugs: Do You Need Nar-Anon?

Warning Signs:

The use and abuse of alcohol and drugs are serious issues that should not be ignored or minimized and we should not sit back and hope they just go away. If left untreated, use and abuse can develop into drug dependence or alcoholism. As a result, it is important to recognize the signs and symptoms of alcohol and drug abuse early. If you're worried that a friend or family member might be abusing alcohol or drugs, here are some of the warning signs to look for:

1. **Physical and health warning signs of drug abuse**

- Eyes that are bloodshot or pupils that are smaller or larger than normal.
- Frequent nosebleeds could be related to snorted drugs (meth or cocaine)
- Changes in appetite or sleep patterns. Sudden weight loss or weight gain.
- Seizures without a history of epilepsy.
- Deterioration in personal grooming or physical appearance.
- Injuries/Accidents and they won't or can't tell you how they got hurt.
- Unusual smells on breath, body, or clothing.
- Shakes, tremors, incoherent or slurred speech, impaired or unstable coordination.

2. **Behavioral signs of alcohol or drug abuse**

- Drop in attendance and performance at work or school- loss of interest in extracurricular activities, hobbies, sports or exercise- decreased motivation.
- Complaints from co-workers, supervisors, teachers or classmates.
- Unusual or unexplained need for money or financial problems- borrowing or stealing- missing money or valuables.
- Silent, withdrawn, engaging in secretive or suspicious behaviors.
- Sudden change in relationships, friends, favorite hangouts, and hobbies.
- Frequently getting into trouble (arguments, fights, accidents, illegal activities).

3. **Psychological warning signs of alcohol or drug abuse**

- Unexplained change in personality or attitude.
- Sudden mood changes, irritability, angry outbursts or laughing at nothing.
- Periods of unusual hyperactivity or agitation.
- Lack of motivation; inability to focus, appears lethargic or "spaced out."
- Appears fearful, withdrawn, anxious, or paranoid, with no apparent reason.

Signs and symptoms of alcoholism and drug dependence:

Alcoholism and drug dependence involve all the symptoms of alcohol and drug abuse, but also involve another element: physical dependence.

1. **Tolerance:**

Tolerance means that, over time, you need more alcohol or drugs to feel the same effects. Do they drink or use more drugs than they used? Do they drink or use more drugs than other people without showing obvious signs of intoxication?

2. **Withdrawal:**

As the effect of the alcohol or drugs wear off the person may experience withdrawal symptoms: anxiety or jumpiness; shakiness or trembling; sweating, nausea and vomiting, insomnia, depression, irritability, fatigue or loss of appetite and headaches. Do they drink or use to steady the nerves, stop the shakes in the morning? Drinking or drugging to relieve or avoid withdrawal symptoms is a sign of alcoholism and addiction.

In severe cases, withdrawal from alcohol and drugs can be life-threatening and involve hallucinations, confusion, seizures, fever, and agitation. These symptoms can be dangerous and should be managed by a physician specifically trained and experienced in dealing with alcoholism and addiction.

3. **Loss of Control:**

Drinking or drugging more than they wanted to, for longer than they intended, or despite telling themselves that they wouldn’t do it this time.

4. **Desire to Stop - But Can’t:**

They have a persistent desire to cut down or stop their alcohol or drug use, but all efforts to stop and stay stopped, have been unsuccessful.

5. **Neglecting Other Activities:**

They are spending less time on activities that used to be important to them (hanging out with family and friends, exercising- going to the gym, pursuing your hobbies or other interests) because of the use of alcohol or drugs.

6. **Alcohol and Drugs Take Up Greater Time, Energy and Focus:**

They spend a lot of time drinking or using drugs, thinking about it, or recovering from its effects. They have few, if any, interests, social or community involvements that don't revolve around the use of alcohol or drugs.

7. **Continued Use Despite Negative Consequences:**

They drink and use even though they know it's causing problems. As an example, you realize that your alcohol or drug use is interfering with you ability to do your job, is damaging your marriage, making your problems worse, or causing health problems, but they continue to drink or use.