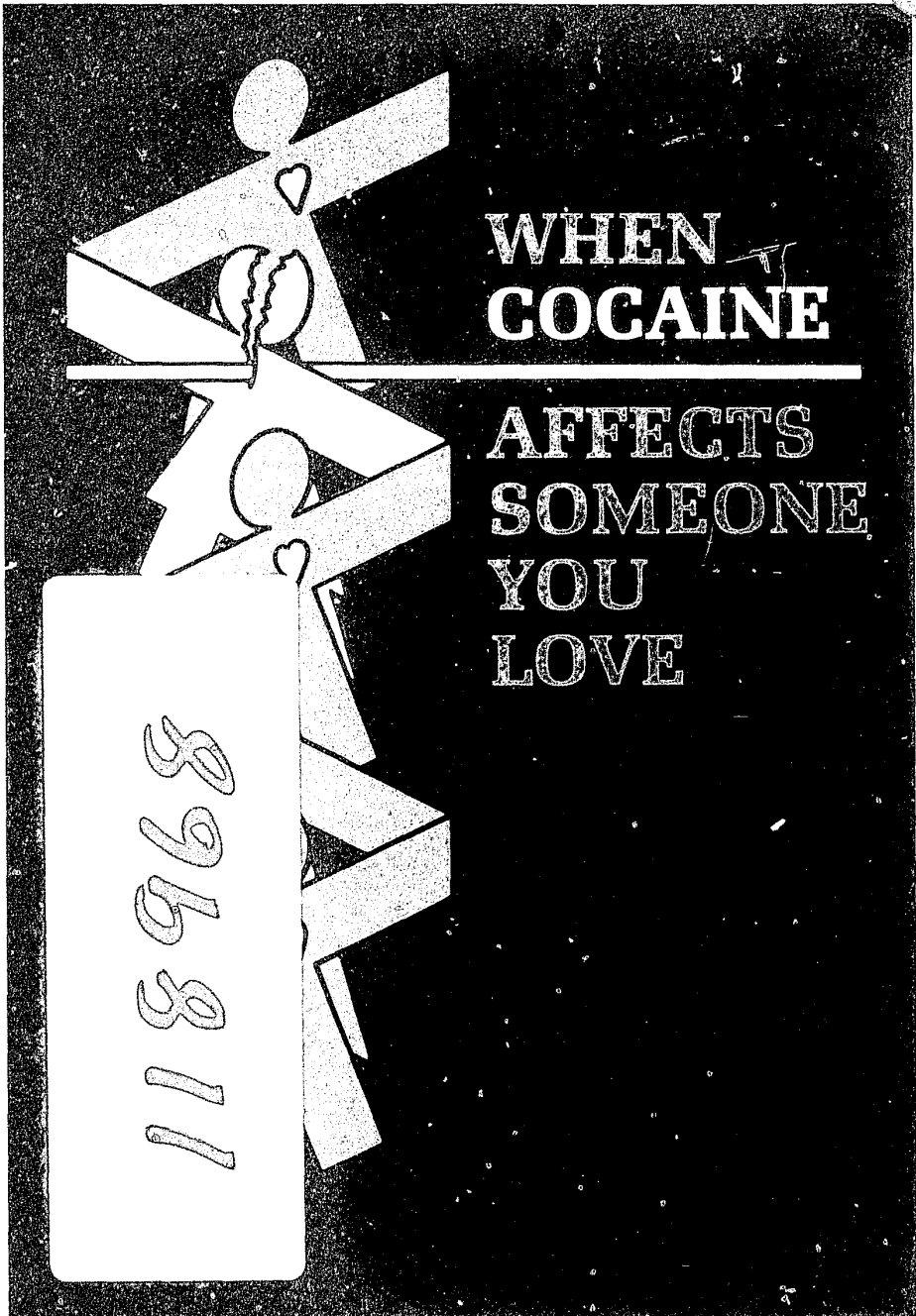


Office for Substance Abuse Prevention

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES ■ Public Health Service ■
Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration

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Cocaine abusers don't exist in a vacuum. They have wives and husbands, sisters and brothers, children, parents, and grandparents, aunts and uncles, lovers and friends, neighbors and coworkers.

It's easy to realize how cocaine can harm the user, but sometimes it is more difficult to see that the drug can also injure the user's family and friends, placing their homes, their emotional lives, their financial security, and their health and safety in jeopardy. Like alcohol abuse, cocaine abuse may affect the user's entire social network.

Recent figures indicate that about 6 million Americans use cocaine. Many of these users have family and friends who also suffer from the drug's effects. This pamphlet addresses the questions and concerns that arise when cocaine affects someone you love and suggests places to turn for help.

Cocaine — particularly in the form of crack — is one of the most powerfully addictive drugs of abuse. Cocaine causes chemical changes in the brain that trigger an intense craving for more of the drug.

Anyone who tries cocaine risks becoming addicted. The drug can become the center of a user's life — more important than family and friends, career, or possessions. For those dependent on cocaine, relationships, professional obligations, and responsibilities to the community lose all meaning.

Users fit no easy stereotype: a large proportion are successful, well-educated, upwardly mobile professionals in their 20s and 30s. But a cocaine user can be anyone — poor or rich, young or old, man or woman.

WHAT IS COCAINE, AND WHO USES IT?

NCJRS

AUG 15 1989

ACQUISITIONS





WHAT PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL SIGNS INDICATE THAT SOMEONE IS USING COCAINE?

Initially, a user may be able to keep drug taking a secret. As use progresses, however, obvious physical signs may result from his or her dependence. These include:

- Weight loss
- Loss of interest in physical appearance
- Chronic runny nose
- Frequent upper respiratory infections

When cocaine is in the user's system, he or she may stay awake for hours and then sleep for extended periods when the drug wears off. Serious physical side effects include high blood pressure, seizures, irregular heartbeat, and heart attacks. Even first-time users may experience seizures or heart attacks, which can be fatal. Cocaine abusers who use the drug intravenously are also at risk for illnesses such as hepatitis and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

Emotional symptoms of dependence can include:

- Loss of interest in friends, sports, hobbies, or other non-cocaine activities
- Hearing voices when nobody has spoken
- Feeling depressed
- Repetitious, compulsive acts such as tapping of fingers or playing with hair
- Change of mood to be less patient, more nervous, or angry

The user may seem uncomfortable in social situations where drugs are not available, withdraw from family situations, and have difficulty carrying out responsibilities and obligations. Even small amounts of cocaine can have psychological effects, making users anxious and suspicious. Users often have difficulty concentrating. They lose interest in food and sex. Some become aggressive; others have panic attacks. Some users suffer "cocaine psychosis," during which they lose touch with reality and may experience delusions and frightening hallucinations.

Symptoms may be hard to spot and few may appear in someone who has just started using the drug. Family and friends may be unaware that the person they love has started using cocaine. But, drug dependence follows a progressive and predictable course, and those users who become addicted to cocaine will push family and friends out of their lives. When they become dependent, cocaine users will give up other drives and pleasures to continue taking the drug. The user changes, and family and friends may find the person they once knew is gone. Left in his or her place is a stranger with whom communication is often difficult or impossible.

IS IT EASY TO TELL IF SOMEONE IS USING COCAINE?

AIDS, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, is a potentially life-threatening crisis for families of drug users who inject the drug into their bodies. Cocaine abusers who share needles or other paraphernalia are at high risk for this deadly infection, which destroys the body's ability to resist disease. If infected, cocaine users can pass the AIDS virus to their sexual partners. The U.S. Surgeon General has recommended that sexual partners of users who inject drugs insist on condom use during sex to help protect themselves from AIDS.

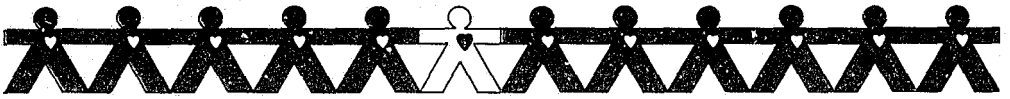
ARE THERE SPECIAL RISKS FOR FAMILIES OF COCAINE USERS WHO USE NEEDLES TO INJECT THE DRUG?

Babies can also be at risk for AIDS. Mothers-to-be who use needles to inject cocaine or who have sex with someone who does can become infected with AIDS and pass the virus on to their unborn babies. For further information about AIDS or how to protect yourself, contact the public health department, your doctor, the Red Cross, or call 1-800-342-AIDS.

Cocaine users spend huge amounts of money on the drug — sometimes their whole paycheck — often leaving families without the necessities of everyday living. As drug use becomes heavier, the user may start selling valuable household items, emptying savings accounts, and stealing from friends and family members. He or she may sell

HOW COSTLY IS COCAINE USE?





the family car or bankrupt a business. At work, the user may steal, embezzle, or pad expense accounts to support a cocaine habit. Many cocaine users turn to robbery, drug dealing, or prostitution to get cash.

Family members of cocaine users must take serious steps to protect their financial assets. An addict will sell anything and everything of value to buy cocaine — no matter what its practical or sentimental value to someone else.

WHY CAN'T COCAINE ABUSERS JUST STOP USING THE DRUG?

Cocaine causes changes in the addicted user's brain that set up an intense craving for the drug. As a result, people addicted to cocaine lose control over their ability to stop taking it. The craving can overpower any will to remain drug free. When addicted, very few cocaine abusers can stop taking the drug on their own. Most need treatment to get off and stay off the drug.

IS IT DIFFICULT FOR FAMILY MEMBERS TO FACE THE PROBLEM OF DRUG ADDICTION?

It can take a long time to confront the fact that someone you love is addicted to cocaine.

Even the strongest, most competent people feel helpless, paralyzed, and alone when faced with a drug problem in someone they care about. It's hard to accept the fact that the person you love is no longer there, that he or she has been changed by cocaine.

In addition, most cocaine users refuse to admit — either to themselves or to loved ones — that anything is wrong. Such denial, which is typical with drug abuse, is a powerful force. Users may continue to deny their drug problem even in the face of direct evidence of what is going on.

Families and friends of the user may deny the cocaine use as well. Avoiding the problem can lead relatives or friends into behavior that covers up the drug use. They attempt to protect the drug abuser from the consequences of addiction by doing things like lending money,

or making excuses for the user's absence from work, school, or family events.

No matter how well-intentioned it may be, such behavior just makes it easier for the user to continue taking cocaine. While it may "help" in the short term by assuring that his or her bills get paid, or that he or she doesn't get fired, it's harmful in the long run and delays entry into treatment.

The life of a family in which someone uses drugs undergoes drastic change. The drug becomes a central concern not only for the user, but for the other members of the family as well. Daily life becomes unpredictable and chaotic. Because the drug has changed the user, familiar ways of communicating no longer work.

Feelings of insecurity, disappointment, resentment, and fear surround the drug problem. Family members tend to feel isolated and alone. Even very young children experience these feelings, although they may not understand what is going on.

Dependence on cocaine causes a range of disturbances: the user's spending and borrowing habits strain the family's finances; he or she may start abusing alcohol as well as other drugs; and illegal activities may begin to threaten the family's safety. The user's poor health causes worry, and his or her emotional isolation from the family becomes a source of anguish.

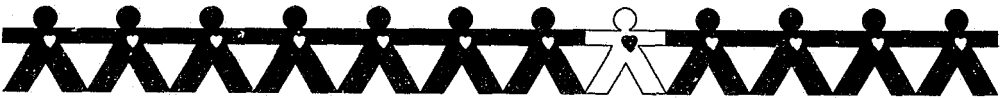
The person using cocaine stops caring about family responsibilities or activities. The mortgage or rent goes unpaid, other bills stack up, even grocery money goes for drugs. Serious arguments or physical abuse may begin. The family stops going out together and avoids inviting people in.

Cocaine dependence has become a family problem and it is time to seek help:

- When family members are burdened by taking over responsibilities that used to be handled by the drug user

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS THAT COCAINE USE IS BECOMING A FAMILY PROBLEM?





- When they find themselves withdrawing from other family members, friends, and coworkers
- When they lose sleep
- When they feel they must cover up the drug use

WHERE CAN FAMILIES AND FRIENDS FIND HELP?

Family members must seek professional help *for themselves*, not just for the person abusing cocaine. The family needs support to regain its emotional health and stability; the cocaine user needs treatment to end his or her addiction. It's important to remember that while a family member can help provide the cocaine user opportunities for recovery, the drug abuser is ultimately responsible for his or her own life.

The families of drug abusers *must* take care of themselves emotionally and physically. Reaching outside the family to seek support is an important step in breaking out of the destructive environment the drug addiction has produced. Sometimes, a telephone call to an anonymous service like the nationwide hotline run by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (1-800-662-HELP) can be a first step. Individual support can come from a trusted family friend, a family doctor, a clergy member, or a professional counselor. Family therapy has also proved helpful for those affected by the drug abuse of a family member.

ARE THERE SUPPORT GROUPS FOR FAMILIES OF DRUG USERS?

For many years, self-help groups such as Al-Anon, Alateen, and Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA) have existed for the families and friends of alcoholics. These groups, which have no dues or fees, can also help families of drug abusers.

Recently, however, support groups patterned after those serving the families of alcoholics have been formed specifically for the families of drug abusers. Nar-Anon is for people whose lives have been affected by a drug abuser; Families Anonymous focuses on the families of drug abusers, as well as those concerned about runaways and delinquents. COCANON family

groups are for people whose lives have been affected by a friend or family member's cocaine habit. These groups are organized into local chapters, which are often listed in the phone book. They exist to help the families of drug users, rather than to address the needs of the users themselves. In the groups, members share experiences and common concerns and work to increase their understanding of how the drug abuse problem affects them. The anonymity of all participants is protected and respected.

For many years, conventional wisdom about substance abuse taught that a user had to "hit bottom" before he or she could begin to fight back to a drug-free life. Experts now know that this is not true; abusers can be reached and helped before their personal, professional, and financial lives are in ruins. The success stories of many treatment programs prove that change can occur. But the way back involves many hard choices for both users and those who care for them. Often, family and friends must fundamentally alter the way they relate to the cocaine abuser.

WHEN IS A COCAINE ADDICT READY FOR HELP?

Recovery is possible. But it can be difficult to begin the process. While family members can help the user by expressing concern and offering opportunities for treatment, support and understanding only go so far.

It is also important to clarify what kinds of behavior are unacceptable. It may be necessary to be firm and set limits in order to save the rest of the family. *Limits must be enforced* to provide a clear message that destructive behavior will have to change if the drug user expects to maintain ties with the family.

One of the most difficult things an afflicted family must learn is to say no — to refuse to do what the abusers are unwilling to do for themselves. Family members and friends must learn to stop certain of their own behaviors that enable the drug use to continue. They must stop lending money, stop covering up for missed work or school days,

IS IT POSSIBLE TO RECOVER FROM DEPENDENCE ON COCAINE?





stop being the user's problem solver. As difficult as this is, it will force the drug-dependent person to experience the consequences of his or her own actions.

Recovery is possible for both cocaine users and for families affected by cocaine use. By participating in treatment, the user can succeed in living drug free; by getting professional help the family can rebuild a structure that is centered around individuals and their needs rather than around a destructive chemical.

HOW CAN FAMILY MEMBERS HELP GET A COCAINE USER INTO TREATMENT?

Intervening in the drug taking of a drug-dependent person is a confusing and sometimes frightening experience for relatives and friends who wish to help. It is difficult to deliver an unpleasant message to a loved one. In addition, the user is emotionally dependent on the drug he or she uses and will resent and resist attempts to disrupt the pattern that has become central to his or her life.

Therefore, seeking professional help when intervening with the drug-dependent family member can be crucial. Many professionals recommend a method called a family action plan or intervention.

HOW DOES AN INTERVENTION WORK?

After several meetings with an experienced health professional, drug counselor, social worker, or psychologist, family members confront the user, and honestly communicate — with a catalog of specific feelings, facts, and events — how the drug use has affected them personally. Friends, employers, or coworkers may take part in the intervention as well.

A professional counselor often leads the actual confrontation. Family and friends express their concern for the user and make it clear that the time has come to make a choice between them and the drug.

The intervention is planned to catch the addict off guard and not to take place when he or she is "high." It is designed to overcome the denial that the user will probably express. A crucial part of the process

is offering the user treatment alternatives, which can be started immediately after the intervention has taken place.

Intervention is not easy. It requires that family members face themselves as well as the drug user, a process that may be painful. But, it can put the user and those who care for him or her on the road to recovery.

For advice and treatment referrals about cocaine addiction:

National Institute on Drug Abuse hotline:
1-800-662-HELP

SOURCES FOR HELP

For literature on cocaine and other drugs:

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol
and Drug Information
P.O. Box 2345
Rockville, MD 20852
(301)468-2600

American Council for Drug Education
204 Monroe Street
Rockville, MD 20850
(301)294-0600

National Federation of Parents
for Drug-Free Youth
8730 Georgia Avenue, Suite 200
Silver Spring, MD 20910
1-800-554-KIDS
(301)585-5437

National Self-Help Clearinghouse
33 West 42nd Street
New York, NY 10036

Local chapters of the following groups can usually be found in the phone book. If no number is listed, contact the national headquarters given here to locate a nearby group. The alcohol-related groups can also offer support for families of someone addicted to cocaine. Do not hesitate to call them if none of the other groups holds meetings close to your community.

SELF-HELP GROUPS





COCANON Family Groups
P.O. Box 64742-66
Los Angeles, CA 90064
(213)859-2206

Families Anonymous, Inc.
P.O. Box 528
Van Nuys, CA 91408
(818)989-7841

Nar-Anon Family Group Headquarters
World Service Office
P.O. Box 2562
Palos Verdes Peninsula CA 92704
(213)547-5800

Adult Children of Alcoholics
Central Service Board
P.O. Box 3216
Torrance, CA 90505
(213)534-1815

Al-Anon/Alateen
Family Group Headquarters, Inc.
7th Floor
1372 Broadway
New York, NY 10018-0862
(212)302-7240

SELECTED ADDITIONAL READING

A Family Like Yours: Breaking the Patterns of Drug Abuse, James L. Sorensen and Guillermo Bernal. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987)

Children and Chemical Abuse: Prevention and Intervention, Stephanie Griswold-Ezekoye, Karol Kumpfer, and William Bukoski, editors. (New York: Hayworth Press, 1986)

Codependent: No More, Melody Beattie. (Center City, MN: Hazelden, 1987)

Getting Tough on Gateway Drugs: A Guide for the Family, Robert L. DuPont, Jr. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, Inc., 1984)

The following publishing houses are among those offering publications on how drug abuse affects the family:

Hazelder Educational Materials
Pleasant Valley Road
Box 176
Center City, MN 55012-0176
1-800-328-9000
(612)257-4010

Health Communications, Inc.
1721 Blount Road
Pompano Beach, FL 33069
(305)979-5408

Krames Communications
312 90th Street
Daly City, CA 94015-1898
(415)994-8800

Additional resources may be found in your local library or bookstore.





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