

# When Addiction Overtakes the Family

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When a member of your family is struggling with a serious addiction, it can overwhelm everyone involved. It can push people away from each other and often impact the financial security of the family. It can also impact the wellbeing of individual family members – especially young children who don't understand what's happening around them.

## Addiction's Effect on the Family

When addiction takes hold of a family member, the family can:

- Be suspicious of the addict's decisions, actions, or intentions.
- Take on the blame for the addict's problems.
- Become afraid of the wild mood swings that the addict might experience.
- Struggle with feelings of disappointment in the addict.
- Feel isolated from the addict.
- Avoid moments where the addict may publicly embarrass the family.
- Suffer from the unfair demands the addict makes on the family.

## Addiction's Effect on Family Roles

Because the family will want to try to help the addict or each other, they often take on different roles:

- The rescuer wants to try to save the addict from his or her behavior and lifestyle.
- The caretaker tries to intervene to keep the family stable even under the demands of the addict.
- The rebel seeks to compete with the addict for attention.
- The hero becomes a model family member, hoping it will outshine the addict's behavior.
- The blamer targets the addict for all of the family's problems – even those the addict is not responsible for.
- The adjuster retreats from moments where the addict creates problems and ultimately from the family as a whole.

Many children who are forced to take on these family roles do not relinquish them as they age. They will often exhibit these roles in their relationships as they age.

## Getting Help for a Family Suffering from Addiction

There are many care programs available locally and nationally that focus on supporting the families of those who struggle with addiction. It's a well-documented fact that when someone suffers from an addiction, he or she doesn't suffer alone and the family needs just as much care as the addict. You can find support through Al-Anon, Alateen, and other groups. Your employee assistance provider (EAP) will offer other recommendations to assist you.

Remember that Southwest EAP is here to help you and your household. If you or a loved one is experiencing problems with substances please feel free to reach out and see how Southwest EAP can help. Contact us confidentially anytime.