



Strategy List for Families Dealing with a Loved One's Substance Use Issue

1. **There are no easy answers.** If anyone tells you they have a simple solution don't listen to them. Change is challenging. (Consider yourself, for example – is change easy for you?)
 - Positive **change** is derived from a combination of **insight, internal motivation** and **external motivation**. These factors often change with time so you may need to adapt your approach
 - **Every human has free will** (whether we like it or not, **acceptance** of this is important)
 - There is **HOPE** – Part of your mission should be to hold on to hope and remain a source of hope (often in combination with a lot of **patience**) – Believe in the capacity for change in your loved one
2. **Keeping a positive focus is better than relying primarily on negatively focused strategies –** (Often easier said than done because of all of the emotions involved)
 - **Nagging is ineffective.** Nagging is often a dysfunctional outlet for the frustrated family member but does little for the individual who is struggling with addiction
 - **“Tough Love” has a time and place** – It is often not a first line tactic but to be used more as a last resort. (The “nuclear” option)
 - **“FBI tactics” alone are not enough** – Staying alert is fine but focusing entirely on staying “one step ahead” is often a losing proposition when dealing with addiction. No matter how hard you try, you will be fooled on occasion and valuable energy can be wasted on surveillance and spying
 - **Honesty** is essential and means a lot more than using deception or trickery. If you expect honesty, then model it yourself for your family member. You lose credibility and trust when you lie
 - **“Use your brain and not your pain”** – As difficult as it can be, do your best to remain reasonable, rational, using sound judgement, rather than lashing out emotionally. Help one another with this
 - **Try to be proactive rather than reactive** – Clear concise warnings of expectations ahead of time can make difficult decisions much easier later. Avoid overly repetitious warnings which can mirror nagging. **Follow through on warnings when needed**
 - **The saying is true: “Trust has to be earned”** – Trust is a lot like managing a bank account with “deposits” and “withdrawals” – Allow trust to be earned with time even when it can be scary to let go
 - **Behavior and attitude are the best measures of progress** – Stay alert to subtle changes either way (but avoid nagging about them). Notice, recognize and praise the positive that you see
 - **Do not undervalue the power of encouragement** – Sow sincere “seeds” of encouragement which may sprout with time. **Emphasize the positive even when it seems small** – Praise is powerful
3. **Sometimes there is more** – If someone is “holding on” to their substance use, often they may not let go until they see something else better to reach out for. **But they have to want it*
 - **Coexisting issues often play a role** – Mental health, trauma, and other issues can be a huge part of the puzzle – Or not – Sometimes addiction is just addiction
4. **Family should be as united as possible** – Communicate, work together, and avoid undermining each other. Be there to provide checks and balances for each other as it is easy to get caught up in emotions and pain. Remember self-care and caring for one another. Don't be afraid to seek help for yourself