

Take the stigma of drug misuse out of the shadows. In Massachusetts, overdose and death due to opioid misuse have reached epidemic proportions. While addiction is never an easy topic of conversation, it's time to think about addiction differently—and talk about it more openly.

Tear down the walls. Deeply ingrained stigmas for people with an addiction disorder can make matters worse. Negative labels—such as "junkie, lowlife or addict"—are degrading and often serve to create self-stigma, hatred, and emotional barriers to seeking treatment. We need to encourage access to treatment and promote recovery, not create barriers.

#### Addiction is not a choice. It's a disease.

The opioid epidemic demands new ideas and bold solutions, many of which are now unfolding at statewide and community levels. New treatment programs and laws are based on the understanding that addiction is not a choice; it's a chronic physical, spiritual, and emotional disease.

### Six Ways You Can Help

- 1. Know the facts. Learn more about the disease of addiction at mass.gov/stopaddiction.
- 2. Rethink your attitudes.
  Changing attitudes can be challenging, but not impossible.
  By learning more about addiction, you might find that you will feel differently about people with substance use disorder.
- **3. Educate family and friends.**Once you know more, share your knowledge. A "word of mouth" campaign can spread very quickly.
- 4. Avoid stereotypes and discrimination. Don't group all people with addiction together. With the proper support, many people with addiction problems maintain active, productive lives at work or home. Discrimination at work, in fact, is illegal under several laws.
- 5. Support people in recovery.

  Recovery is rarely easy; it may take multiple attempts. Help friends or family reach recovery by offering a sober, supportive environment.
- 6. Advocate for change. Despite progress, federal laws still prohibit parents with drug convictions from getting food stamps. Others face insurmountable hurdles to finding jobs. Insurance may not cover treatment. Support changes in federal and state legislation that remove unfair and unnecessary obstacles.

#### What you say and do really matters.

Today it's nearly impossible to not know someone struggling with addiction—and we all can play an important part in turning the tide.

If you reach out to help someone struggling with addiction—or if they talk to you first—here are a few simple tips for keeping things positive.

**Support without judgment.** Being supportive could simply mean serving as a sounding board – someone who will listen without passing judgment. Just talking about addiction with a trusted friend can provide enormous relief.

#### The healing power of empathy.

Express your concern and understanding for the situation. Offer your help—it could be a meal, an errand, or a ride. Little favors can make a big difference.

## Get Involved!

Visit helpline-online.com where you'll find information about:

- Local coalition meetings
- Community overdose vigils
- Recovery support centers and more

Find an open 12 step meeting at www.nerna.org

# Platitudes and quick-fix solutions don't work. Claiming that "the addiction will pass" or "it's just a phase" may seem helpful, but it's rarely good advice – and

No, it's not "...their own fault." Telling someone struggling that addiction "is their own fault" or "they chose to use" only reinforces the stigma. Keep reminding yourself that addiction is a disease, not a choice.

mostly, it's just not true.

While at work or school. Be mindful that a colleague or schoolmate could be struggling with addiction. Nasty labels or comments can make them afraid to seek help. Avoid stigmatizing conversations and language by offering your insights about the realities of addiction.

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