

## New program supports families affected by substance use

For families who battle substance abuse, a dark cloud often can hover over the one who has the addiction and can permeate the entire family. A new program offers a light in the darkness to families dealing with this issue. Optum's Family Support Program offers help to families who have a child up to age 25 who has a substance abuse problem.

- A dedicated family support specialist can provide phone access to licensed clinicians who will:
- Assess the situation;
- Educate you about the addiction and the available resources nearest you;

- Guide you through treatment options and refer a treatment facility or clinician; and
- Support you in communicating with your child, and in taking care of you and your family.

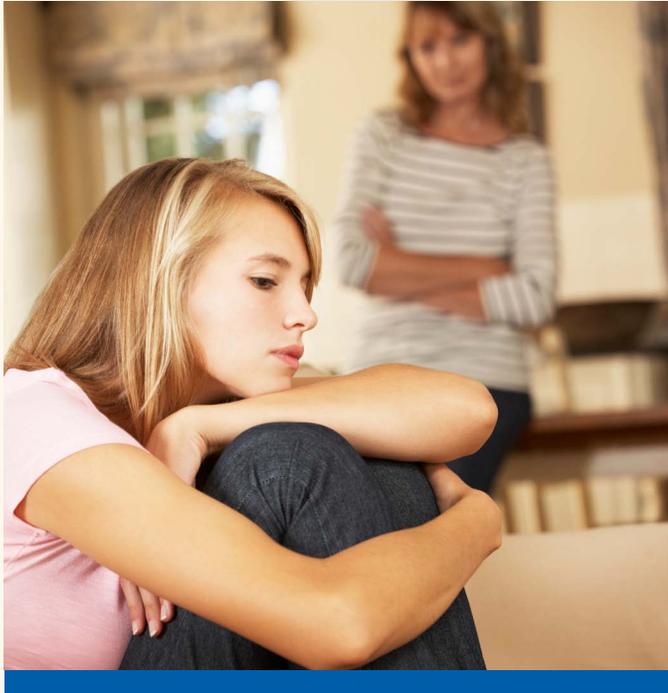
This program, by Optum Behavioral Solutions, is available at no additional cost to state employees and their dependents who are enrolled in the State of Ohio medical plan. Support and resources are available for as long as is needed.

For details about Optum's Family Support Program, call either the Ohio Employee Assistance Program at 800-221-6327 or the program's toll-free phone number: 877-229-3440 (TDD/TYY: Dial 711 and the phone number), or log onto Optum's Live and Work website, [liveandworkwell.com](http://liveandworkwell.com), and enter the access code: 00832.

By Eric Hagely, Ohio Department of Administrative Services

# Family Therapy

Family therapy, which aims at understanding individual problems within the context of the family, has proved helpful in treating a wide range of emotional disorders, including depression and bipolar disorder, anxiety disorders, substance use disorders, eating disorders and conduct disorders. Family treatment considers those aspects of family life that cause or sustain the problems, as well as family strengths and resources available to help resolve the problems.



In many cases, family therapy provides support and education as each member tries to live with another's emotional distress. Concurrently, issues within the family, such as problems in the marriage, unresolved grief or a family secret, actually cause or worsen an individual member's emotional symptoms. Family therapy routinely speaks to certain problems that unwittingly perpetuate or promote symptoms in individual members, among them a lack of generational boundaries, severe marital conflict, rigid or chaotic rules, projection of parental feelings onto a child, or neglectful or overly involved relationships.

In general, therapy offers families the opportunity to learn more productive ways of communicating with each other. It fosters mutual support, positive reinforcement, direct communication and more effective problem-solving within the family. It may offer instruction on conflict resolution as well.



## Coping with Mental Illness and Addiction

Mental illness and substance use disorder are each challenging disorders in their own right. When people with a mental illness begin to use alcohol or drugs, the situation becomes even more difficult.

Substance use tends to worsen the course of mental illness and makes treatment more challenging. Seeking professional help is the first step towards recovery. Once under the care of a trained professional, there is a lot you can do to ensure your own recovery and mental health. The following are some simple tips.

### Helpful Strategies

Learn all you can about your illness and share the information with your family and support group: Read books, attend lectures, talk to your doctor and therapist and ask questions. Educate your family and loved ones about the illness. Ask them to support you in your effort toward recovery.

Get involved in the treatment planning: Set small realistic goals with the help of your doctor or therapist. If your family is interested in being supportive, make them aware of your goals and tell them how they can help you achieve them.

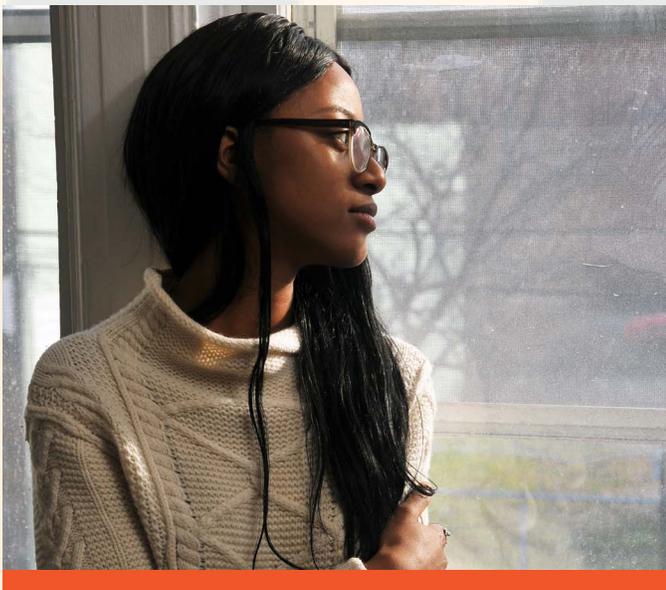
Work an honest program: Denying or minimizing the impact of substance use or making excuses are not uncommon, but they do get in the way of treatment. Be honest with yourself and others about the extent of your substance use and your feelings about abstinence and/or medication compliance. Also, be honest about your strengths and weaknesses. It is quite possible that some of your strategies for coping have not been helpful to you.

Be open to feedback even if it is not particularly positive: The first step in making serious changes in your life is to accept that you need to do things differently. Be willing to listen to others. Find out what has worked for them. Try new strategies and don't be too proud to change your ways.

Take your medications as prescribed: You may be tempted to stop your medications or to not take them as they are prescribed. Non-adherence to medications can put you at risk for a worsening of your psychiatric symptoms. Always speak to your doctor first before changing the dosage or stopping your medications. Also, be sure to let all of your treatment providers know about your substance use (this includes medical doctors, dentists, and all other physicians). Ask them not to prescribe medications that would compromise your recovery.

Stay away from alcohol and drugs: Substance use tends to worsen the symptoms of psychiatric illness and make treatment more difficult. It can also reduce the effectiveness of your medications. Attend support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Double Trouble or Dual Recovery Anonymous. Stay away from friends who use drugs or alcohol.

Know your relapse triggers and warning signs: Work with your therapist and support group to identify your warning signs. A relapse starts long before you use a substance or take a drink. There are generally many warning signs that precede a relapse and they all involve slipping back into old habits. Some common examples include erratic attendance at recovery groups



or treatment sessions, reconnecting with peers who use alcohol and/or other drugs, forgetting to tell your medical doctor about your problems with substance use, and getting prescribed a mood-altering medication.

Structure your day: Too much idle time can be set you up for relapse. Make sure you fill your schedule with healthy, productive activities. If you are not working, consider taking classes, doing volunteer work, or attending a day treatment program.

Don't give up hope: Even though progress can sometimes seem slow, don't lose sight of your goals. Use your therapist, family, and support system to get you through the challenging times. Always keep your strengths and values in mind. Remember to have compassion for yourself.

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Your employee assistance program offers confidential help for personal problems and concerns. Concerned

about a troubled family member who won't get help? Feel tired and exhausted, but don't know if it's burnout, loss of motivation, depression or all three? Late for work too often? Has the use of alcohol or drugs created a crisis you are facing right now? The bottom line, never wonder if your concern is appropriate to contact OEAP. So, if you've been putting off taking action to solve a serious issue that is weighing on you, give OEAP a call today.

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