

Everything was going so well... why a relapse happens?

Carrie's parents organized a gathering to celebrate her completing rehab...



A few weeks later...



By the end of that summer...



In the office of Mr. Owl, counsellor...



A few months later...



Lapses and relapses



Being part of the life of a person who has substance use issues is often stressful. Even if your loved one has succeeded in reducing or stopping their substance use, you may still worry about the possibility of them going back to their old habits, even after a long time. This is a completely natural concern to have.

What is the difference between a lapse and a relapse?

- A *lapse* is when your loved one temporarily starts to use more than they would've liked after a period of abstinence or controlled use.
- A *relapse* is when your loved one resumes their substance use in a problematic way.
- Lapses and relapses are obviously discouraging for both you and your loved one.
- Know that you can't force your loved one to stop using, nor can you control their substance use for them. Try to trust their journey and accept that there may be bumps in the road, including lapses and relapses.
- Also, be aware that just because a person resumes using substances doesn't mean that they will do so in a problematic or concerning way. Your loved one may be able to use without slipping back into problematic habits if they've developed new strategies to cope with their difficulties that reduce the harm associated with their substance use.

As for you:

- Once you've understood that lapses and relapses are part of your loved one's recovery process, you need to apply strategies to protect and take care of yourself.
- Here are some stories from family members who, just like you, have experienced difficult times. Perhaps the strategies they used will inspire you in your own journey.

"Before, when Steph relapsed, I would isolate myself and not tell anyone. I was so discouraged and embarrassed that I avoided the subject. Now, I realize that it feels good to talk about it with other family members or friends. It helps me feel less alone and find solutions."

Petapen, 30 years old

"Since she came out of rehab, I made a deal with my daughter that I would drive her to her nights out with her friends instead of having her take the car. That way, I can sleep better, because I know that if she lapses, at least she won't drive."

Mahik, 44 years old

"When I see that my friend is on the verge of a relapse, I suggest doing fun activities in places where there is no alcohol."

Wynoma, 28 years old

"I don't feel safe when my grandson is using at home with his friends, so I asked him to go do so elsewhere."

Greg, 62 years old

"I used to avoid going to restaurants with my friends for fear that my husband would drink while I was away. Since then, I've started seeing a counsellor and she helps me make different choices."

Shawnouk, 55 years old

"Since her relapse, when my sister comes home from a night out, we agreed that she would eat cereal. So, I no longer worry that she will forget something on the stove."

Dayanna, 40 years old

This project is a work of co-construction involving several people from various Indigenous nations and organizations. The comic book format, the stories and the contents were chosen with the intention of supporting family and friends with compassion and empathy. Thanks to the family and friends of people experiencing addiction, to the students (Eden, Gloria, Kassandra and Marie-Pier), to the caregivers, to the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission, and to the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services.

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Resources

Hope for Wellness Helpline

1 855 242-3310
hopeforwellness.ca

Support group for the family and friends of people affected by addiction
al-anon.org/al-anon-meetings

Youth Helpline

1 800 668-6868
kidshelpphone.ca

Referral line about substance use
1 800 265-2626
aidedroque.ca/en

Health or addiction rehabilitation center near you