



The Partner's Guide

 SUBSTANCE USE

Loving someone who drinks or uses

A warm, practical guide for the partner of someone whose drinking or using has taken over: how to step out of the covering-up loop, help in a way that works, and stay safe while looking after yourself.

Who this is for: the wife, husband or partner of someone who drinks or uses.

Cited: peer-reviewed research, WHO, and Tele-MANAS.

Languages: English, Hindi, Marathi, and Kannada.

Read it free at weave.clinic/family

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✿ IS THIS US

Naming the pattern

✿ IN SHORT

If your partner's drinking or using seems to run the house, and you have become tense, watchful, and unsure whether the problem is them or you, putting a name to the pattern often brings quiet relief. You are not imagining it, and you are not alone.

You know the shape of it by now. The waiting up. The counting. The way a good evening can turn in a moment. You watch their mood the way other people watch the weather, and somewhere along the line you stopped being sure whether the trouble was theirs or something you were doing wrong.

There is real relief in learning this has a name. Naming what is happening is the first step out of the fog. It lets you stop asking whether it is your fault and start asking what actually helps. Only a doctor can say for certain what is going on for your partner, and this booklet puts no label on them. It is here to help you see the pattern clearly and respond in a way that works.

Both of you

carry the load, not just one

When someone's drinking or using takes over, partners and close family often carry heavy money worries and daily disruption, and the strain grows with how severe the problem is.

You are not weak for feeling worn down, and this did not happen because of anything lacking in you. In a study of 200 Indian families living with a drinking problem, partners and other close relatives carried a real, measurable weight: money worries, disrupted routines, a home reorganised around the next episode, and the burden grew heavier the more severe the problem was. That is not a flaw in you. It is what living close to this condition does, and it can change once you can see it.



A hard evening, a steady line, and the choice to protect yourself without shutting the door.

Priya has been married to Sameer for eight years. He is generous and funny, the one everyone loves at a gathering. But the drinking crept in, and then it took over. Priya has become the one who covers the shortfall, makes the excuses to relatives, keeps it from the children, and lies awake bracing for the sound of the door. Lately she cannot tell where his problem ends and her exhaustion begins.

Priya has not done anything wrong, and neither, at heart, has Sameer. What she is carrying is real, and so is what he is struggling with. It is a pattern, and patterns can change once you can see them plainly.

● TRY THIS

For two days, just notice, without bringing it up in the moment. When does the tension spike, evenings, money, family events? When do the two of you feel easy and close? You are not fixing anything yet. You are learning the shape of your own cycle.

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✿ WHAT IT IS, AND WHAT IT IS NOT

The illness, and the person

✿ IN SHORT

This is a health condition that changes how the brain handles wanting and stopping. The broken promises are the illness at work, not proof that you do not matter. You did not cause it, you cannot cure it, but you can change your part and you can help.

Here is the part that changes everything once you both believe it. This is a condition that changes how the brain handles wanting and stopping, so the person keeps drinking or using even when it costs them the things and the people they love. The returning to it, again and again, is not a message about how much they love you. It is the illness at work, not a verdict on you.

It is a recognised, treatable health condition, not weakness and not a choice they make to hurt you. Seeing it this way is not making excuses. It lowers the shame that keeps so many families silent, and it opens the door to the truer, kinder frame: you did not cause it, you cannot control it, and you cannot cure it, but you can change your own part, and you can help.



The day I understood the drinking was the illness pulling him back, not him choosing it over me, I stopped taking every broken promise as proof I did not matter.

Priya, 34

This matters because of what blame does. When the drinking reads as "he does not care", every broken promise feels like a wound, and you defend yourself by getting harder. When it reads as "the illness has hold of him", you can stand on the same side of the problem instead of on opposite sides of each other.

In many Indian homes the verdict comes fast, from relatives, from in-laws, sometimes from inside your own head: he is weak, she should manage him better, look at how easy other couples have it. That verdict is heavy and it is wrong. Because this is a health condition, treatment exists and recovery is possible, and seeing it that way is where the shame starts to lift.

REMEMBER

The behaviour is not the whole person. The broken promises, the returning to it, the swings in mood, these are features of the condition, not signals about how much your partner loves you. Naming that quietly, to yourself, takes the sting out of the hardest moments.

More, if you want it

Seeing it as an illness does not mean excusing everything or pretending the load on you is not real. It means you stop fighting a character you invented and start working on a problem you can actually share. "This has hold of you, and I am tired, so let us face it together" is a sentence you can both stand next to. "You have ruined everything" is not.

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✿ THE CYCLE YOU KEEP REPEATING

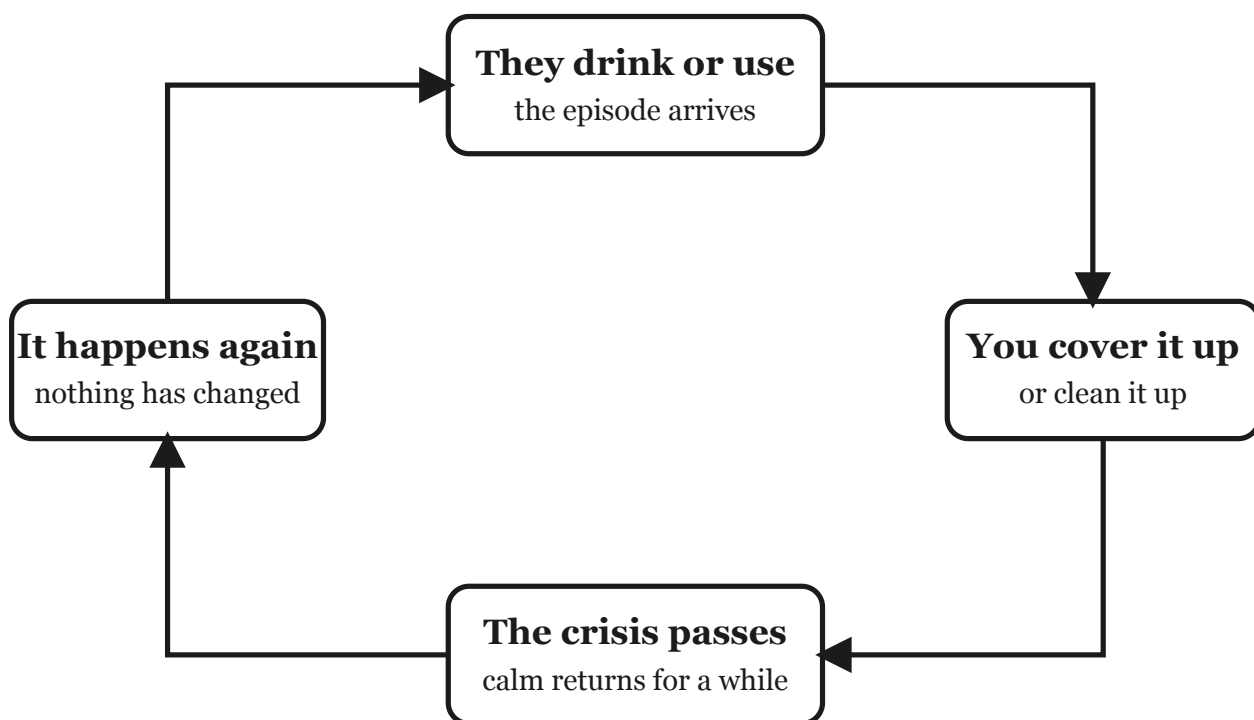
The loop that wears you both down

✿ IN SHORT

Many couples get stuck in a loop: they drink or use, you cover for it or clean it up, the crisis passes, calm returns, and then it happens again. Each turn wears you both down. Naming the loop is how you find where you can step differently.

The loop is quiet and well-meant, which is exactly why it is so hard to spot. They drink or use. You cover the shortfall, or make the excuse to relatives, or clean up what got broken, because someone has to. The crisis passes and calm returns for a while. And then it happens again, and each turn wears you both down a little more.

Covering the shortfall, hiding it from the children, or paying off what they owe can feel like love. But it often removes the natural consequences that might move them toward help. Naming the loop out loud, to yourself first, lets you see where you can step differently. You cannot control their part, only your own.



The loop that wears you both down. It comes from love and from having no other choice in the moment, and either of you can step differently.

They drink or use, and the episode arrives.

You cover it up, make excuses, or clean up the mess.

The crisis passes and calm returns for a while.

It happens again, because nothing underneath has changed, and it starts over.

Watching every mood, walking on eggshells, and bracing for the next episode is exhausting, and over time it can quietly harm your own health. Money trouble and being hurt by a partner who drinks are linked to real distress and lower wellbeing for the person living alongside it. Seeing the loop is most of the escape. You do not have a love problem so much as a pattern problem, and patterns are far easier to change than character.

More, if you want it 

Notice where you each enter the loop. Their entry point is the episode; yours is the moment you step in to cover, clean up, or smooth it over. You cannot make the condition vanish, but you can change your own step in the chain, and that alone can slow the whole thing down. When one person stops playing their usual part, the loop loses its rhythm. That is not abandoning them. That is taking your own move back.

● TRY THIS

Next time you feel the loop starting, name it out loud, gently, to yourself: "We are in the cycle again." Then ask one question: is there one thing I usually rush to fix that I could, safely, let stand this time? You are not being cruel. You are stepping out of a step that was never helping.

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✿ WHAT ACTUALLY HELPS, WHAT BACKFIRES

Warm and steady beats lectures

✿ IN SHORT

Warm, steady, non-shaming talk works better than lectures, threats, or arguing with someone while they are intoxicated. Wait for a calm, sober moment, and speak to the person, not the problem.

The strongest help is not a lecture, a threat, or a fight at the door while they are intoxicated. It is warm, steady, non-shaming talk, chosen for a calm and sober moment. **Speak to the person, not the problem.** Try small, specific asks instead of grand demands, and notice sober days out loud instead of only ever naming the bad ones.

How the close family responds genuinely matters, and it can be learned. A supportive approach that rewards sober time and steps back from covering for the drinking has been shown to roughly double the chance the person actually enters treatment, compared with doing nothing new. You are a team facing the condition together, not opponents.

Twice as likely

to enter treatment

A warm, supportive, non-confrontational approach roughly doubles the chance a resistant drinker actually starts treatment.

You benefit too

even before they change

Partners who learn this approach report better mental health and a steadier home, even before the drinking shifts.

A few moves carry most of the weight. Wait for the calm, sober moment. Make small, specific asks rather than big ultimatums. Appreciate sober days out loud, because what you notice tends to grow. And let honest consequences stand rather than rushing to fix every mess, since the fixing is often what keeps the loop turning.

 REMEMBER

Keep the door open, do not beg. An ultimatum delivered in anger closes the door; a steady, warm invitation keeps it open. "I want you well, and I will help you get there whenever you are ready" is more powerful than any threat. Reward the sober time you see, and let the drinking carry its own natural weight.

 TRY THIS

This week, catch one sober evening and say something warm and specific about it, not "finally", just "it was nice having you here tonight". Notice how different that feels from the usual conversation about the drinking, for both of you.

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✿ WITHOUT LOSING YOURSELF

Your own life still matters

✿ IN SHORT

You are their partner, not their therapist or their rescuer. You are allowed a life, sleep, friendships, and plans that do not revolve around their next episode. Looking after yourself is the oxygen mask, not selfishness.

You are their partner, not their therapist and not their rescuer, and you are allowed to have a life. Sleep, friendships, and plans that do not revolve around the next episode are not luxuries. Looking after yourself is the oxygen mask, not selfishness. Partners who learn about the condition and get their own support report better mental health and a steadier home, even before the drinking changes.

Boundaries are not punishment. They are the line that protects you and the children, such as not handing over money for drink, or not staying in the room when things turn frightening. A boundary is something you keep for yourself, not a threat you hold over them. "I will not give money for drink" is a fair line, and a fairer home usually starts on the other side of it.

In many Indian homes the whole family leans on the steady one, and if that is you, the load multiplies quietly. Relatives may hand you the managing and then judge how you do it, or ask you to keep hiding it. You do not have to win every conversation. A short, steady line helps: "We are dealing with this in our own way." Then keep one corner of your life that is just yours, a friend, a walk, a thing you do for no one but you.

More, if you want it

Lean on people you trust, a family support group, or a counsellor of your own. Carrying this silently is the heaviest and least helpful way to carry it. Saying the hard part out loud to someone who does not judge takes weight off your chest, and it is often the first place you hear that none of this was your fault. Resentment and loneliness both grow in silence, and neither survives long once you are not carrying this completely alone.

● TRY THIS

This week, choose one thing that is only for you, half an hour with a book, a call to a friend, a walk without your phone, and take it without guilt or apology. Notice that the house does not fall apart, and that you come back with a little more patience than you left with.

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✿ WHEN TO STEP IN, AND CRISIS

Knowing when to act, and where to turn

✿ IN SHORT

Some signs mean act now: talk of ending their life, severe confusion or fits while cutting down, passing out and not waking properly, or violence toward you or the children. Do not wait these out. Free, round-the-clock help is a phone call away.

Some signs mean act now, not later. Talk of ending their life. Severe confusion, shaking, or fits while cutting down. Passing out and not waking properly. Or any violence toward you or the children. **Do not wait these out.** Drinking is closely tied to being hurt by a partner, so if you or your children ever feel unsafe, your safety comes first: have a plan, a packed bag, and a trusted person you can reach quickly.

You do not have to know the right words or handle this alone. You can call **Tele-MANAS on 14416**, free, any time, from anywhere in India, to talk to a trained counsellor for yourself or to ask how to help them. In an immediate emergency, call **112**. Reaching out for them is not a betrayal. It is often the most loving and effective thing a partner can do.

♥ IN YOUR CORNER

If your partner is not safe, or is talking about not wanting to be here, or if you or the children are ever frightened, call **Tele-MANAS on 14416**, India's free national mental health helpline, day and night, in many languages, for you or for them. In an emergency call **112**. The crisis card linked below has more people you can reach, any time.

What about treatment and medicine? A doctor or a de-addiction service can guide what comes next, and for some people, when the difficulties are significant, a medicine a doctor may consider is part of that plan. That is a decision made with a doctor, weighed case by case alongside counselling and the everyday steps you take together, never an automatic step and never the whole answer. A good clinician treats it as one part of a bigger plan and reviews it over time.

 REMEMBER

You cannot be their whole treatment, and you were never meant to be. Your steadiness helps, but a doctor and a de-addiction service carry the parts you cannot. Face the condition as a team, keep the door to help open, look after yourself while you do, and reach out early. That is not giving up. That is how the two of you get stronger.



The same partner the drinking pulls away can be the one who comes back to the life you are building, once you stop fighting each other and start facing the condition together.

● TRY THIS

Tonight, name one thing your partner did well today, however small, and, if it is safe to, say it to them out loud. Then write down one thing you would want to ask a doctor or a de-addiction service, and keep it on your phone. Two small moves, one toward each other and one toward help, are how the long road starts.

WHERE THIS COMES FROM

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FURTHER READING

- WHO: Alcohol, key facts and health impact

This guide helps you recognise and understand. It is not a diagnosis. For that, see a professional.

- Feeling like it is all too much? **Read the crisis card.** Help is one page away.