

Self-Care for Families

Family Guide · The Recovery Files

In the app only: the self-assessments Mental Health Self-Care, Expectations & Boundaries, Coping Readiness (scored, so they stay in the app).

The Importance of Self-Care for Families in SUD Recovery

Your Well-Being Matters — Because You Can't Pour from an Empty Cup

Welcome

In the challenging landscape of substance use disorder (SUD) recovery, the focus often centers on the individual struggling with addiction. But the impact of SUD extends far beyond that one person — it profoundly influences the entire family system. If you're here, you already know this. You've felt it.

This interactive worksheet is designed specifically for you — the family member walking alongside someone in early recovery. It explores three critical pillars of self-care: addressing your personal mental health needs, setting realistic expectations, and developing coping strategies. These aren't luxuries or afterthoughts. They are essential practices that sustain your resilience, protect your well-being, and ultimately create a more supportive recovery environment for everyone.

Through readings, self-assessments, interactive worksheets, and a personalized action plan, you'll build a concrete self-care foundation that grows with you. This is your recovery too — and it begins right here.

What You'll Learn & Practice:

- Understand how SUD impacts your mental health and learn to prioritize your own healing
- Set realistic expectations about recovery — for your loved one and for yourself
- Build a personalized coping strategy toolkit across physical, emotional, and social domains
- Complete three comprehensive self-assessments to understand where you are today
- Practice self-compassion, boundary setting, and emotional regulation skills
- Create a personalized Family Self-Care Action Plan you can implement immediately

Important Reminders Before You Begin

- Seeking support for yourself is not selfish — it's essential for sustainable caregiving
- There are no "right" answers — this is about honest self-awareness, not perfection
- You may experience strong emotions working through this material — that's normal and healthy
- Take breaks when needed — you don't have to complete everything in one sitting
- This worksheet supports but does not replace professional mental health guidance
- Your progress is saved automatically — you can return anytime

Your Starting Point

What is your relationship to the person in early recovery?

[Select... / Spouse/Partner / Parent / Adult Child / Sibling / Grandparent / Other Family Member / Close Friend]

How long has your loved one been in recovery (this time)?

[Select... / Days (0-30 days) / 1-3 months / 3-6 months / 6-12 months / More than 1 year / Not yet in recovery / pre-treatment]

How would you rate your current level of self-care? (1 = Not at all, 10 = Excellent)

Not at all[1-10] Excellent5

What brought you to this worksheet today?

Addressing Personal Mental Health Needs

The Foundation of Sustainable Family Support

The stress of supporting a loved one through SUD recovery can take a significant toll on your mental health. Chronic stress, anxiety, depression, and even symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are common among families affected by addiction. These are not signs of weakness — they are natural human responses to extraordinary circumstances.

Addressing your personal mental health needs is crucial not only for your own well-being but also for your ability to provide effective support. Think of it this way: a depleted caregiver cannot sustain quality care. Your mental health is the foundation upon which everything else is built.

"You can't pour from an empty cup. Taking care of yourself isn't selfish — it's the most important thing you can do for your family's recovery."

Common Mental Health Impacts on Families

- Chronic anxiety about your loved one's safety and choices
- Depression from grief over losses real and anticipated
- Trauma symptoms from exposure to dangerous situations
- Compassion fatigue from extended caregiving without self-care
- Identity erosion when caregiving consumes your entire sense of self
- Isolation from shame or the demands of the caregiver role

Pillars of Family Mental Health

- Professional support: Individual therapy tailored to caregiver needs
- Community: Support groups where your experience is understood
- Boundaries: Clear limits that protect your emotional reserves
- Self-awareness: Knowing your warning signs before you hit crisis
- Routine: A personal wellness practice that isn't optional

Reflection Questions

How has your loved one's SUD specifically affected your mental health?

What are you currently doing (if anything) to address your own mental health needs?

What is one mental health support you have been putting off that you could pursue this month?

Setting Realistic Expectations

What Recovery Really Looks Like for Families

One of the most significant sources of pain for families is the gap between expected and actual recovery. When we expect linear progress and get a non-linear journey, we experience repeated disappointment, anger, and fear. Learning to set realistic expectations is not pessimism — it is the foundation of sustainable hope.

The Reality of Recovery

- Recovery is non-linear: Progress is real even when the path zigzags
- Relapse is common: Between 40-60% of people experience relapse — it's a data point, not a verdict
- Early recovery is the hardest phase: The first 90 days are the most unstable neurologically
- Relationships heal slowly: Trust is rebuilt through consistent action over months and years, not days
- Your loved one is figuring out who they are: Identity reconstruction takes time

Signs of Real Progress (That Families Often Miss)

- Attending recovery support activities consistently
- Asking for help before a crisis, not after
- Admitting mistakes more quickly than before
- Showing awareness of their own triggers
- Making amends, even imperfectly

Reflection Questions

What expectations have caused you the most pain when not met?

How might you reframe one of those expectations in a more realistic way?

What small signs of progress have you observed that you may have minimized?

Building Your Coping Strategy Toolkit

Evidence-Based Approaches for Family Resilience

Effective coping is not about eliminating stress — it's about building your capacity to respond to it without being overwhelmed. Research on family resilience shows that people who cope well with the challenges of loving someone with SUD use multiple strategies across physical, emotional, social, and cognitive domains.

Physical Coping

- Regular exercise (even 20-30 min/day significantly reduces anxiety)
- Consistent sleep schedule (7-9 hours)
- Balanced nutrition and limiting caffeine/alcohol
- Regular medical checkups (stress affects physical health)

Emotional Coping

- Therapy or counseling (CBT is particularly effective for caregiver stress)
- Journaling — naming emotions reduces their intensity
- Grief work — SUD involves real losses that need to be mourned
- Practicing self-compassion instead of self-criticism

Social Coping

- Al-Anon, Nar-Anon, or SMART Family groups
- Maintaining friendships outside of the caregiving role
- Family therapy for shared processing
- Being honest with trusted people about what you're going through

Cognitive Coping

- Challenging catastrophic thinking ("What is actually true right now?")
- Separating what you can control from what you cannot
- Reframing setbacks as data, not verdicts
- Practicing gratitude for small wins

Reflection Questions

Which coping domain (physical, emotional, social, cognitive) is your strongest?

Which domain needs the most development?

What is one new coping strategy you would be willing to try this week?

Worksheet: Mental Health Inventory

Understanding and Addressing Your Emotional Wellbeing

Describe your current mental/emotional state in your own words:

How has your loved one's SUD specifically impacted your mental health?

What are YOUR personal warning signs that your mental health is deteriorating?

What mental health support do you currently have?

What support do you still need but don't currently have?

What is ONE concrete step you can take this week for your mental health?

Worksheet: Expectation Reality Check

Examining and Recalibrating What You Expect

What are your current expectations for your loved one's recovery in the next 3-6 months?

Which expectations might be unrealistic given the nature of recovery?

Which expectations are driven more by fear than by realistic understanding?

Rewrite 2-3 of your expectations in a more realistic way:

What are your non-negotiable expectations (boundaries you've set)? These should be about behaviors, not outcomes.

What small signs of progress would you be willing to recognize and celebrate?

Worksheet: Coping Strategy Builder

Build Your Personal Toolkit Across All Domains

Physical coping strategies I'm committed to:

Emotional coping strategies I'm committed to:

Social coping strategies I'm committed to:

Cognitive coping strategies I'm committed to:

Unhealthy coping patterns I want to reduce:

My plan for a crisis moment when my coping skills feel unavailable:

Worksheet: Boundary Setting Planner

Identify, Communicate, and Maintain Your Boundaries

What boundaries do you currently have in place?

What boundaries are frequently crossed or that you struggle to maintain?

What new boundaries do you need to establish for your wellbeing?

How will you communicate these boundaries clearly and calmly?

What are the consequences if these boundaries are crossed? (Specific, proportional, follow-through-able)

What support do you need to maintain these boundaries?

Worksheet: Self-Compassion Practice

Treating Yourself With the Kindness You Deserve

The Three Components of Self-Compassion (Dr. Kristin Neff)

- Mindfulness: Acknowledging your pain without over-identifying with it
- Common Humanity: Recognizing that suffering is universal — you are not alone
- Self-Kindness: Treating yourself with the same care you'd offer a good friend

Write down a self-critical thought you frequently have about your role in your loved one's recovery:

If a close friend told you this about themselves, what would you say to them?

Now apply that same compassionate response to yourself:

List 5 things you're doing RIGHT in supporting your loved one:

Is there something you need to forgive yourself for? What happened, and what would forgiveness look like?

Family Self-Care Action Plan

Your Personalized Commitment to Wellbeing

My Self-Care Commitments

What I will do THIS WEEK for my mental health (1-2 specific actions):

What I will put in place THIS MONTH (recurring practices, appointments, or commitments):

My support network (specific people and resources I will reach out to):

My boundary commitments (specific and behavioral):

My plan when I notice warning signs that I'm struggling:

Write a compassionate message to yourself for your hardest days:

Resources & Next Steps

You Don't Have to Do This Alone

Family Support Organizations

Al-Anon Family Groups

12-step support for families affected by a loved one's drinking

www.al-anon.org

1-888-425-2666

Nar-Anon Family Groups

12-step support for families affected by a loved one's drug use

www.nar-anon.org

1-800-477-6291

Crisis & Emergency Resources

SAMHSA National Helpline

24/7 treatment referral (free, confidential)

1-800-662-4357

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or Text 988