

What Is Families Anonymous?

Families Anonymous® (FA®) is a Twelve Step, self-help, mutual-support fellowship of people whose lives have been affected by the use of mind-altering substances or related behavioral problems of a relative or friend.

Why Is FA Needed?

Substance use disorder is a disease with dire physical, mental, emotional and spiritual impacts on the people who suffer from it.

And its effects don't stop with just those people. It is, in reality, a *family disease*, with devastating effects on the relatives and friends who watch in despair as it overpowers and consumes their loved ones.

The pain and anguish felt by parents, grandparents, spouses, partners, siblings and others are symptoms of *codependency*. Codependency is an imbalanced interpersonal relationship in which the well-being of one person, such as a parent, depends on the well-being of another person, in this case the addicted loved one.

Codependent people often need special help to regain their own lives, find some peace of mind, let go of over-responsibility, and stop making situations worse by enabling other people's self-destructive behaviors. FA provides that special help.

As FA members attend meetings and work their Twelve Step program, they begin making critical changes in themselves. They learn the value of staying tuned in to a loved one but not interfering directly in that person's actions. They practice encouraging and supporting their loved one's *positive* choices but avoid getting caught up in any problems or issues that are not their own.

How Does FA Work?

The focus of the FA program is on the family, not on the substance user (for whom many other recovery programs are available).

FA groups are open to anyone concerned about another person's current, former or suspected use of drugs or alcohol. Groups hold meetings (in-person, online, or by phone), usually weekly, in locations throughout the United States and in more than a dozen other countries. No dues or fees are required for membership. Anonymity is stressed in all aspects of the program for the protection of members and their loved ones; for this reason, first names only are used.

By following FA's Twelve Step program of recovery—which includes basic readings, discussion of FA-approved literature, and sharing of experiences—members find a way to put their lives back together and achieve some sense of serenity.

Over time, the changes they make in themselves can carry over to others and have a positive impact on their family dynamics, most likely benefiting even their addicted loved ones.

How Can FA and Professionals Cooperate?

People suffering the effects of a loved one's substance use disorder often turn to the professionals in their lives for guidance about what to do or where to get help.

Countless professionals from all walks of life have *made referrals* to FA throughout the half century since its inception.

Many also turn to FA for their own *personal healing*. They attend FA meetings regularly as lay members, leaving their jobs outside the meeting room door. In FA, everyone is equal and anonymous. By maintaining each other's anonymity (for example by not divulging last names or other personal details, such as where members reside or what they do for a living), FA groups are able to keep "principles above personalities."

Some professionals go even further, by *starting additional FA groups*. Once a group is up and running, the professional steps aside so that *all* the group's members can have a role in managing its meetings in accordance with FA's Twelve Traditions, which require autonomy, anonymity, rotation of leaders, and no other affiliation.

Clergy

As you counsel the parents, other relatives, and friends of people who have substance use disorder, you most assuredly encounter their questions of doubt, denial, low self-worth, and faltering religious beliefs. We invite you to let Families Anonymous help you help them.

FA is a *spiritual* program. Its message is one of self-help facilitated by group interaction. FA meetings are open to everyone, regardless of religious belief or affiliation (or the lack of either).

In FA, the common thread binding all members together is the fact that everyone is dealing with similar problems of substance abuse in their families. In FA meetings, they find a safe, nonjudgmental space where they can share personal experiences—challenges, hopes, setbacks, successes—in an open, honest way. Here they can learn and gain support from one another. They are welcome to accept what they feel they can use and to leave the rest behind, possibly to consider at another time.

Members learn to differentiate between what they *can* change (themselves) and what they *cannot* change (other people). They let go of the past, stop obsessing over the future, and focus on living today. They learn better ways to handle problems caused by their substance-using loved ones, such as listening and *responding* rather than tuning out and simply *reacting*. They identify and resolve their own negative self-perceptions and

become more serene, peaceful, and accepting of reality. This, in turn, for many people, can rekindle a dormant interest in their religious faith despite the persistence of unsolved problems.

Our Invitation to You

We invite you to learn more about Families Anonymous by visiting our website or by contacting our World Service Office (see information below).

Find meetings that exist in your community and beyond—and get help starting new ones.

Discover FA's wealth of recovery literature, some of it available for free download.

Look through recent and past issues of FA's newsletter, the *Serenity Messenger*, and read testimonials and personal stories written by FA members who tell how the program has changed their lives and put them on a path toward recovery and serenity.



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FAMILIES ANONYMOUS and the PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY



A Pamphlet Especially for CLERGY