



# Supporting Parents and Families Impacted by Alcohol & Other Drug use

**Support programmes available in Local and Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force areas**



Irish Community Action  
on Alcohol Network  
Supported by Alcohol Forum

[www.alcoholforum.org/icaan](http://www.alcoholforum.org/icaan)

A close-up photograph of several hands stacked together in a supportive grip. The hands are of various skin tones and are positioned in a way that suggests mutual support and strength. The background is blurred, showing a person wearing a dark, patterned shirt. The overall mood is one of solidarity and empowerment.

**“The most common way  
people give up their  
power is by thinking they  
don’t have any.”**

**Alice Walker**

# Introduction

**Life can be a real challenge. Many families experience difficulties with alcohol and other drugs, gambling addiction, conflict, anxiety, separation and loss. Problem alcohol and other drug (AOD) use not only affects the individual themselves but also impacts others, directly and indirectly. Family Support is an approach to working with families which focuses on prevention and builds on the strengths of family members. Drug and alcohol misuse have a considerable impact on families; causing distress, anxiety and threatening the wellbeing of family members. Families can often feel very isolated and alone.**

There can be significant barriers to families accessing support; including fear, stigma and seeing the person who is experiencing the dependency as the one who needs help and support, while often ignoring their own needs. But perhaps the biggest barrier is not knowing where to turn and not knowing that help is out there. This resource has been developed by the Irish Community Action on Alcohol Network to share information about different types of support programmes that are available to children, partners, parents and other loved ones who are being negatively impacted by a loved one's alcohol or other drug (AOD) use.

The first section of the booklet outlines some of the different programmes that are available across Ireland. The second section provides contact details for the 24 Local and Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Forces which cover different areas of Ireland. There is no one size fits all. The focus in developing this resource was on community-based programmes provided at no cost to families (although in a small number of cases, there may be a low-cost nominal contribution sought). The focus here is on formal family support programmes and interventions. All of the programmes included are evidence based or their development has been informed and shaped by evidence, reflecting the drive towards evidence-based practice across Task Forces over the past decade.

Self-help groups, including Al-Anon family groups and SMART recovery family and friends groups also offer support for affected family members, but are not included here. Private providers have also not been included.

# Why Contact Your Local or Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force?

**Local and Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Forces implement the National Drug and Alcohol Strategy in the context of the needs of their local area. Task Forces comprise representatives from a range of relevant agencies, such as the HSE, the Gardaí, education and training boards, and local authorities, as well as elected representatives and representatives of the voluntary and community sector.**

If you need support, or if you are working with an individual or family who needs support as a result of a loved one's alcohol or other drug use, we recommend that you contact the Task Force in your local area to find out about what is available. There are a variety of charity, community, voluntary, and statutory organisations involved in the delivery of alcohol and other drug family support and your local Task Force can provide information on which programmes and interventions are available.

## Why Involve Families?

**You might wonder why family or loved ones should be involved in the treatment and recovery journey. Sometimes, family and loved ones' question this themselves or do not recognise that they too can benefit hugely through accessing support. Drug and alcohol use is not an isolated issue but it is, very much, a family affair. Family involvement is very important in recovery in a number of different ways, both as a support to the person who is using alcohol or other drugs and also for family members as part of their own recovery and healing.**

**In 2017, the National Drug and Alcohol Strategy, 'Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery', adopted a more inclusive definition of service user, outlined below:**

'The term 'service user' includes people who use health and social care services and their families. It also includes people who are potential users of health services and social care interventions, including people who use drugs, who may not yet have availed of treatment'.<sup>1(P.66)</sup>

Central to many of the interventions and programmes being delivered across Task Force areas is a whole family approach involving both parents and children. Some programmes work directly with children and young people while other programmes are designed for adults living with a family member who has dependency issues.

Copello, Velleman, and Templeton (2005) claim that there are three broadly grouped types of treatment for families;

- A. Working with affected family members to promote the entry and engagement of a family member with substance problem into treatment.
- B. Involving affected family members in the treatment of the family member with the substance problem.
- C. Responding to the needs of the affected family member and providing services/ treating them in their own right. This third type concentrates on services given directly to families, and unfortunately, it has received the least attention to date.<sup>2</sup>

This short report aims to provide a snap-shot of some of the good and emerging good practice being supported across Task Force areas in the area of drug and alcohol family support. The programmes described may fall into any of the three categories above.

Problematic use of alcohol and other drugs is a complex issue and continues to be one of the most significant health and social challenges facing our society. Approximately a third of people in Ireland are engaged in harmful drinking and many are engaged in illicit drug use (DoH Prevalence)<sup>3</sup>. This affects families and communities and can have serious implications for outcomes for children from conception right throughout the life span. Hope<sup>4</sup> found that one in seven 18 to 40-year-olds said they often felt unsafe as a result of parental drinking during childhood. The same number said they often witnessed conflict between parents, either when drinking or as a result of drinking.

Through their grass roots work over the past 20 years, Regional and Local Drug and Alcohol Task Forces became acutely aware that much of the harm arising from alcohol and other drug use in Ireland, was experienced by children, partners and parents of the person experiencing dependency. Many Task Forces developed programmes, adopted and adapted programmes and worked with a range of organisations at the local level to address the needs of family members.


Over the past decade, there has been a significant focus on evidence with many organisations working together to identify needs, review evidence and build skills and capacity to introduce evidence-based practice in the area of alcohol and other drug (AOD) family support.

In the area of family support, there is no ‘one size fits all’. An array of effective, non-judgemental and evidence-based programmes are available across Ireland. Choices around which programmes have been developed in different geographical areas have been influenced by several considerations; including funding, local need, collaborations with different organisations and the knowledge, training and skills of organisations on the ground. This following section of the report outlines a range of the evidence-based programmes currently being delivered across Ireland. It is important to note that it is not an exhaustive list of programmes and interventions. Criteria for inclusion was based on whether the programme has an established evidence base or if its development was informed by evidence. In addition, the focus here was on community-based programmes provided at no cost to families (in some instances, there may be a low-cost nominal contribution sought). The focus here is on formal family support programmes and interventions.

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## FOOTNOTES

1. Department of Health (2017). *Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery* educing Harm, Supporting Recovery: A health-led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017-2025
2. Copello AG, Velleman RD, Templeton LJ. Family interventions in the treatment of alcohol and drug problems. *Drug Alcohol Rev.* 2005 Jul;24(4):369-85. doi: 10.1080/09595230500302356. PMID: 16234133
3. Mongan, Deirdre and Millar, Sean and Galvin, Brian (2021). *The 2019-20 Irish National Drug and Alcohol Survey: main findings*. Dublin: Health Research Board.
4. Hope A (2014). *Alcohol's harm to others in Ireland*. Dublin: Health Service Executive.



**“After beginning my journey in recovery... it wasn’t just me that needed to recover. The pain & hurt I had caused my family was immense...”**

# Supporting Children & Families

## Programmes Being Delivered

This section gives an overview of 12 different family support programmes that are currently being delivered in Ireland to families impacted by a family members alcohol or other drug use.

All programmes included are evidence based or evidence informed. There are a variety of organisations involved in the delivery of these programmes and your local Task Force will be in a position to let you know what programmes are in your area, where and when they are available and how you or a family you are working with can access them. It is important to note that different areas have different programmes available and through contact with the relevant Task Force you will be able ascertain what is available.



# 5-Step Family Support

The 5-Step Method is a structured, evidence based brief intervention for family members affected by another person's alcohol and/ or drug use. In Ireland, 5 Step is now delivered in both group and one to one settings, as appropriate to the needs of families. It is a method of working with family members of substance users and problem gamblers, developed and evaluated by the AFINet Group in the UK. Evaluation suggests that it leads to a reduction in stress and strain experienced by family members of a close relative with a drug or alcohol problem. The steps are (1) Listen, reassure, explore concerns, (2) Provide relevant information, (3) discuss coping, (4) Discuss social support, (5) Direct family member to other appropriate help.



**Who is it for?**

**Adult family members impacted by another's alcohol and/ or other drug use.**

# Steps to Cope

Steps to Cope is an evidence based brief structured psychosocial intervention to support young people living with parental alcohol and / or other drug use or mental health problems in their family. It is a youth-focused adaptation of the adult 5-Step Method, an evidenced approach to supporting adult family members living with someone who misuses substances. (Templeton & Sipler 2014). Although developed later, there is a growing body of evidence on effectiveness and impact of the Steps to Cope programme with young people.



**Who is it for?**

**Young people aged 11-18 years.**

# **CRAFT**

CRAFT is a set of therapeutic techniques taken from community reinforcement approach (CRA) and applied to work with family members impacted by a loved one's alcohol and / or other drug use . Rather than target the person with addiction directly, CRAFT works with the concerned significant others (CSOs) so that they can assist the identified patients (IPs). CRAFT supports family members to build skills and feelings of confidence and power to actively assist their loved one in moving treatment forward.



**Who is it for?**

**Adult family members.**

# **Adolescent Community Reinforcement Approach (A-CRA)**

The Adolescent Community Reinforcement Approach (A-CRA) is a developmentally-appropriate behavioural treatment for youth and young adults ages 12 to 24 years old with substance use disorders. A-CRA seeks to increase the family, social, and educational supports available to the young person on their treatment and / or recovery journey. This intervention has been implemented in a range of inpatient and outpatient settings. A-CRA includes guidelines for three types of sessions: individuals alone, parents/caregivers alone, and individuals and parents/caregivers together.



**Who is it for?**

**12 to 24 year olds with substance use disorders and their family members.**

# Non-Violent Resistance Training (NVR)

NVR is an evidence-based, non-blaming and relatively short-term intervention model that empowers parents and people working with them to take positive action to end the abusive and/or violent behaviour of a child. It also helps through respecting and protecting children and all family members. While the relationship between substance use, child to parent violence and domestic violence is complicated and not a simple causal one, evidence does, however, indicate that problematic alcohol and other drug use are associated with elevated levels of family violence.



**Who is it for?**

**Parents experiencing child to parent violence.**

# Strengthening Families Programme (SFP)

The 14-week skills-based programme is internationally recognised to have a positive impact on family relationships, leading to reduction of criminal behaviour and alcohol & drug misuse, and increasing positive behaviour and school performance in young people. SFP is a strengths-based intervention approach that focuses on building protective factors, where parents themselves can identify and build on their own strengths to help enhance their parenting capacity.



**Who is it for?**

**SFP is delivered with both high risk and general population families, with two different programmes available, depending on the age of children.**

# Moving Parents and Children Together (M-PACT)

M-PACT is a ten-week brief intervention to support children aged 8-17 whose parents have drug and/or alcohol problems. Having completed a thorough assessment to ascertain if families have capacity to participate meaningfully and safely; children and their parents / guardians work together in a friendly safe environment with a team of highly skilled facilitators who help them find ways to achieve improvements in family life. The family member misusing substances is not required to be in recovery or treatment, but evidence indicates that the programme contributes to changes family dynamics and supports increased motivation for the parent abusing substances to enter treatment.



**Who is it for?**

**Children aged 8-17 and their parents.**

# RISE Programme

The RISE programme is a 10-week non-residential family programmes with a team of addiction counsellors. RISE provides individual one-to-one and group counselling services to people adversely affected by a family members addictive behaviour. The programmes support families to understand the impact of addiction on relationships, teach self-help mechanisms in dealing with stress-strain-coping-support and assist family members in empowering themselves to find their own recovery. Participation in the programme is not dependent on the loved one entering treatment or being in recovery.



**Who is it for?**

**Whole family programme.**

# Triple P Parenting; Positive Parenting Programme

Triple P is a parenting intervention with the main goals of increasing the knowledge, skills, and confidence of parents and reducing the prevalence of mental health, emotional, and behavioral problems in children and adolescents. The program was originally tailored for at risk children and parents, but there are now different levels of Triple P designed to work together as a broad, universal, public health approach. This program is based on principles of community psychology.



**Who is it for?**

**Parents and care-givers.**

## Parenting Under Pressure

The Parents Under Pressure (PuP) program combines psychological principles relating to parenting, child behavior and parental emotion regulation within a case management model. The program is home-based and designed for families in which there are many difficult life circumstances that impact on family functioning. Such problems may include depression and anxiety, substance misuse, family conflict and severe financial stress. The program is highly individualized to suit each family. Parents are given their own Parent Workbook. For many parents, this becomes a personal journal of their treatment experience. The overarching aim of the PuP program is to help parents facing adversity develop positive and secure relationships with their children.



**Who is it for?**

**Parents and caregivers.**

# Young Persons' Support Programme

The Young Persons Support programme is a 10-module activity-based programme specifically designed to meet the needs of young people who are aged under 18 and are living with a relative's addiction problem. The programme draws from a number of evidence-based approaches, such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Mindfulness, and Emotional Intelligence, and has been adapted from SibShop, a U.S. programme for supporting siblings of people with disabilities. The programme emphasises a non-judgemental, non-prescriptive approach that supports the young people on their own terms and in their own rights, rather than merely family members of someone in addiction.



**Who is it for?**

**Young people under aged 12 – 17 impacted by a relatives AOD use**

## STRONG

STRONG is an eight-week activity-based programme incorporating art, clay and sand play to support children to explore and express emotions. The programme teaches skills for resilience and coping in a supportive and non-judgemental environment. STRONG is designed to run in conjunction with a family support service so that the parents/carers have a clear understanding of what the children are learning and how they can support the work at home. STRONG is a support programme and is not designed as a therapy programme or a therapy substitute. Facilitators will refer on to and work with therapy or counselling services as appropriate.



**Who is it for?**

**Children between 7 and 11 years impacted by a parents / care-givers alcohol and or other drug use.**

A group of people, mostly women, are seen from behind in a lush green field. They are holding their hands up to form heart shapes against a bright, clear sky. The scene is bathed in warm, golden light, suggesting late afternoon or early morning. The text is overlaid in the center of the image.

**“My control over alcohol is really helping me with my family, we now have a good relationship”**

# Other Programmes Delivered

In developing this resource, it became apparent, that in addition to the core programmes outlined in our survey of Task Forces, other programmes are being delivered in some areas. Again, this may not be an exhaustive list as new programmes and interventions are introduced across Task Force areas in response to new and emerging needs on an ongoing basis.

The 'other' programmes identified by Task Forces are listed below. A short description of each is provided.

- **Insight:** Insight is an evidence-based programme that aims to help families with practical strategies about how to talk to loved ones about their substance use, better respond to and manage challenging behaviours and practice self-care. Information on where to access additional help and support is provided. This programme has been adapted from the Breakthrough programme by Turning Point in Australia.
- **Parents Plus:** Parents plus delivers seven Parenting and Mental Health Programmes which can be delivered individually or in small groups, both in person and online, to families, parents and young people.
- **Peer-led family support groups:** these groups offer support for family and friends of those impacted by a loved one's alcohol and / or other drug use.
- **Play therapy with young children:** Play therapy is a form of therapy where a therapist encourages a child to explore life events that may have an effect on current circumstances, in a manner and pace of the child's choosing, primarily through play but also through language. In a number of Task Force areas, play therapy is used as a way of working with children impacted by parental alcohol and / or other drug use.
- **Have Only Positive Expectations:** HOPE is an evidence-informed six-week online programme for the "whole family". It is a skills-based programme for families experiencing challenges that arise from family stress, conflict, alcohol or other drug use, mental health or safety concerns. It is delivered online by skilled facilitators working with individual families.



- **Targeted youth work interventions:** In a number of areas, targeted youth work interventions have been developed working with young people impacted by alcohol and / or other drug use.
- **SMART recovery groups** Self-Management and Recovery Training (SMART) are mutual-support groups where participants help one another resolve problems with any addiction (to drugs, alcohol, gambling, over-eating etc). This is a science based, self-empowered, addiction recovery model which now also runs 'family and friends' support groups.





# Local and Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Forces

There are 24 Local and Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Forces throughout Ireland. See below for details of the Task Force in your local area. Contact them today to find out about what support services are available to family members impacted by a loved one's alcohol other drug use.

Find details of the Task Force in your area here. In addition, the HSE Drug and Alcohol Helpline can be contacted on 1800 459 459 or email [helpline@hse.ie](mailto:helpline@hse.ie) and they can give you information on what family support is available in your area.

## Dublin North

- **Ballymun Local Drugs Taskforce**  
01 883 2142 / [www.ballymunlocaldrugtaskforce.ie](http://www.ballymunlocaldrugtaskforce.ie)
- **Blanchardstown Local Drug & Alcohol Task Force**  
01 824 9590 / [www.blanchardstowndrugtaskforce.ie](http://www.blanchardstowndrugtaskforce.ie)
- **Dublin North East Drugs & Alcohol Task Force**  
01 846 5070 / [www.dnetaskforce.ie](http://www.dnetaskforce.ie)
- **Finglas/Cabra Local Drug and Alcohol Task Force**  
01 830 7440 / [www.finglascabraldtf.ie](http://www.finglascabraldtf.ie)
- **North Dublin Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force**  
01 223 3493 / [www.ndublinrdtf.ie](http://www.ndublinrdtf.ie)  
*North Fingal – Swords, Balbriggan, Malahide, Rush/Lusk/Skerries, Donabate, and rural North Co Dublin.*
- **North Inner City Drugs and Alcohol Task Force**  
01 836 6592 / [www.nicdatf.ie](http://www.nicdatf.ie)

## Dublin South

- **Ballyfermot Local Drug and Alcohol Task Force**  
087 330 9024 / [www.ballyfermotldatf.ie](http://www.ballyfermotldatf.ie)
- **Canal communities local Drug & Alcohol Task Force**  
086 384 5542 / [www.ccldatf.ie](http://www.ccldatf.ie)
- **Clondalkin Drug and Alcohol Task Force**  
01 457 9445 / [www.clondalkindrugtaskforce.ie](http://www.clondalkindrugtaskforce.ie)
- **Dublin 12 Local Drugs & Alcohol Task Force**  
07669 55657 / [www.d12ldatf.ie](http://www.d12ldatf.ie)
- **Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Drugs Taskforce**  
087 649 4922 / [www.dlrdatf.ie](http://www.dlrdatf.ie)
- **South Inner City Drug & Alcohol Task Force**  
01 6206438
- **Tallaght Drug and Alcohol Task Force**  
01 464 9303 / [www.tallaghtdatf.ie](http://www.tallaghtdatf.ie)

## Southern:

### Cork and Kerry

- **Southern Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force** (Counties Cork & Kerry)  
021 493 0100 / [www.srdatf.ie](http://www.srdatf.ie)
- **Cork Local Drug & Alcohol Task Force**  
021 493 0100 / [www.corkdrugandalcohol.ie](http://www.corkdrugandalcohol.ie)

## East Coast:

### East Wicklow & South-East Dublin

- **East Coast Regional Drug & Alcohol Task Force**  
01 2744132 / [www.ecrdatf.ie](http://www.ecrdatf.ie)
- **Bray Local Drug & Alcohol Task Force**  
087 462 3501

## Mid-West Region:

### Clare, Limerick, Limerick City & Tipperary North

- **Mid-West Regional Drugs and Alcohol Forum**  
061 607 242 / [www.mwrdatf.ie](http://www.mwrdatf.ie)

## Midlands:

### Laois, Longford, Offaly, & Westmeath

- **Midlands Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force**  
09064 83195 / [www.mrdatf.ie](http://www.mrdatf.ie)

## **North-East:**

Cavan, Louth, Meath & Monaghan

- **North-Eastern Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force**  
042 9248630 / [www.nedrugtaskforce.ie](http://www.nedrugtaskforce.ie)

## **North-West:**

Sligo, Leitrim & Donegal

- **Northwest Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force**  
071 919 4556 / [www.nwdrugtaskforce.ie](http://www.nwdrugtaskforce.ie)

## **South-East:**

Carlow, Kilkenny, South Tipperary, Waterford & Wexford

- **South-East Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force**  
051 848863 / [www.serdatf.ie](http://www.serdatf.ie)

## **South-Western Region:**

South and West Dublin, West Wicklow & Kildare

- **South-Western Regional Drugs and Alcohol Task Force**  
045 875111 / [www.swrdatf.ie](http://www.swrdatf.ie)

## **Western:**

Galway, Mayo & Roscommon

- **Western Regional Drugs & Alcohol Task Force**  
091 480 044 / [www.wrdatf.ie](http://www.wrdatf.ie)

# Other Supports / Services

## HSE National Drug and Alcohol Helpline

The HSE Drugs & Alcohol Helpline provides support, information, guidance and referral to anyone with a question or concern related to drug and alcohol use and/or HIV and sexual health. The service is non-judgemental and offers space to talk about your situation, to explore some options and to consider your needs. During calls/ emails, staff refer to a database of over 400 services nationwide. Opening hours are Monday to Friday, 9.30am and 5.30pm.

**Call 1800 459 459 or Email [helpline@hse.ie](mailto:helpline@hse.ie)**

## Self-Help Groups

**SMART Recovery** - [www.smartrecovery.ie](http://www.smartrecovery.ie)

SMART Recovery® for Family & Friends (F&F) weekly meetings are for any person affected by the addictive behaviour of someone close to them.

**Al-Anon and Al-Ateen Ireland** - [www.al-anon-ireland.org](http://www.al-anon-ireland.org)


Al-Anon & Alateen offers understanding and support for families and friends, whether their loved one is still drinking or not.

**Adult Children of Alcohol Misuse - Ireland** - An Irish campaign intending to raise public awareness of the issues faced by children and adult children of alcohol misuse in Ireland. Currently led by a small group of activists. For more info or to get involved visit [@adultchildirl](https://www.facebook.com/adultchildirl) on facebook, instagram and twitter or by email [adultchildrenirl@gmail.com](mailto:adultchildrenirl@gmail.com).

## Alcohol Forum Ireland

Alcohol Forum Ireland (AFI) is an independent national charity which provides a range of supports to individuals, families and communities impacted by alcohol and other drug harm, while also working at the wider policy level to challenge and change Ireland's problematic relationship with alcohol. AFI provides ongoing support to and co-ordination of the Irish Community Action on Alcohol Network, which produced this report.

**[www.alcoholforum.org](http://www.alcoholforum.org)**

A photograph of a stone staircase in a forest, with a quote overlaid on it. The staircase is made of large, dark stone steps and is surrounded by ferns and fallen leaves. The background shows tall, thin trees in a misty or foggy atmosphere. The overall color palette is muted, with a purple tint.

**“You don’t have to see  
the whole staircase,  
just take the first step.”**

**Dr Martin Luther King**

# Support & Information

**If you require any further information on this report  
you can contact us on the details below:**

T: +353 (0)74 25596

E: [paula@alcoholforum.org](mailto:paula@alcoholforum.org)

[www.alcoholforum.org/icaan](http://www.alcoholforum.org/icaan)

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