

EDITION 75 - SUMMER 2019

NEWSLETTER

BY FAMILIES, FOR FAMILIES

FAMILY DRUGHELP
We've been there



Dual Diagnosis

Welcome to the Summer edition of the Family Drug Help Newsletter in which we focus on dual diagnosis.

What's in a name? Dual diagnosis refers to one or more diagnosed mental health problems occurring at the same time as problematic drug and alcohol use. But what's the human experience, and how do families cope with the uncertainty, worry and maelstrom of emotions that arise when a family member or friend has co-occurring mental health and substance use issues?

In this edition we explore different perspectives on the lived experience of dual diagnosis, how families cope, and ways to get support.

The most important thing is that you are not alone. Others have walked or are walking this path, and there are services and supports that can help.

For some families, it might be the shock of a new diagnosis, such as drug induced psychosis, or the chronic experience of coming to terms with a loved one's substance use and mental health challenges.

Summer and the festive season can be a challenging time as families come together and are confronted by the complexity of their loved one's life – "warts and all".

Family Drug Help is a service you can turn to, but we are lucky that there are so many other supports available as well, which are listed in the newsletter.

From all of us at FDH, we wish you a safe and special festive season.

Robert Campbell
Programme Manager
FDH

Call our helpline for enquiries or bookings for any of the programs, including counselling, or go to www.familydrughelp.org.au for further information.

 1300 660 068

 Interpreter service available

 fdh@sharc.org.au

Befriending Feelings

Today I befriend my feelings without judgment.

If I am still lonely or depressed I need not act on that feeling, seeing it as unrecovered, then going through complicated mental machinations to change it.

Instead I give it space and observe it, knowing that this process will have a transforming effect.

I allow myself to feel other than what I am supposed to feel.

I give room to a feeling and befriend it rather than push it away with impatient, intolerant thoughts.

My feelings allow a pattern.

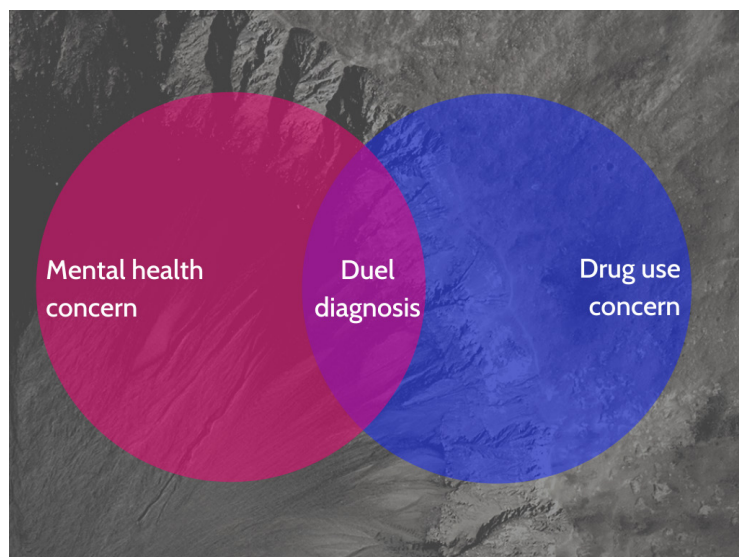
Rather than control them, I simply watch as a feeling arises, intensifies, hangs around inside me, and lifts all on its own accord.

I need not rush my own process of life today.

I can be with it. I can allow it to be with me.

I can be fully human and alive.

Anonymous



12 Things to Know about Dual Diagnosis

1. Dual diagnosis refers to one or more diagnosed mental health problems occurring at the same time as problematic drug and alcohol use.
2. A dual diagnosis condition can include:
 - a mental health problem or disorder leading to or associated with problematic alcohol and/or other drug use
 - a substance use disorder leading to or associated with a mental health problem or disorder
 - alcohol and/or other drug use worsening or altering the course of a person's mental illness
3. Dual diagnosis is an evolving field, both in understanding causal relationships and developing effective strategies for prevention, treatment and recovery.
4. The combination of mental illness and substance use disorders is widespread, particularly among (but not exclusive to) young people.
5. People with a mental illness may use alcohol and other drugs episodically or continuously.
6. People also can use substances to reduce symptoms of their illness or the unwanted effects of their medication.
7. Many people with drug and alcohol problems have higher rates of mental illness than the general community, most commonly depression and anxiety. Alcohol and drug use is also common among people experiencing psychosis and other serious mental illness.
8. Factors that contribute to the complexity of a diagnosis include:
 - the type, intent and frequency of drug use
 - the nature and severity of illness
 - the age of the individualthe physical and social impact of either or both disorders
9. Illicit drug and alcohol use compounds a mental illness, even if the frequency and intensity of use do not meet the criteria for a substance use disorder.
10. Population health research shows high rates (up to 50 per cent) of alcohol and drug use among people with severe mental health problems.
11. Depression and anxiety are the most prevalent disorders co-occurring with drug and alcohol misuse, although rates of drug use among people with psychosis are also high.
12. Dual diagnosis capability refers to the evolving capacity and orientation of workers, agencies and sectors to routinely identify, welcome and respond effectively to a range of co-occurring mental health and substance use concerns. It does this with an integrated treatment, recovery-oriented focus with the person and their family or carers driving their recovery.

Source: <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/mental-health/practice-and-service-quality/specialist-responses/dual-diagnosis>



Photo by Elijah Hiett on Unsplash

InFocus

InFocus is a FREE six session education program for people affected by someone's drug or alcohol use.

Helping break the stigma, the program offers practical support, relevant information, coping strategies and the opportunity for people to connect through their shared experiences.

The program is facilitated by professionals who have also been impacted by someone's drug and alcohol use.

**You don't have to
do this alone –
we've been there.**

the supper club

The Supper Club is a place you can come to gain support and talk openly about a loved one who has passed away as a result of substance use.

The group meets on the second Tuesday of each month,
5.45pm - 7.45pm,
at SHARC,
140 Grange Road

A light meal is provided.

What I have learnt from a loved one experiencing dual diagnosis?

(in no particular order)

I have learnt how to communicate better.

I have learnt how to say no and not feel guilty about it.

I have learnt that if I don't sleep enough or nourish my body and mind in healthy ways that I will pay for it and so will my partner.

I have learnt patience.

I have learnt acceptance and that I cannot force, control or change my loved one's mindset, behaviour and actions. I can, however, control my own.

I have learnt that knowledge is power. Educating myself about what my loved one is experiencing helps me to have a better understanding, show them compassion and identify any possible triggers. Also learning about healthy family relationships is imperative as there may be toxic communication that is unhealthy, and keeping everyone stagnant and not progressing. It is important to all be on the same page.

I have learnt that laughter is the BEST medicine. I could not imagine my life without it.

I have learnt to look past the diagnosis and not focus on it. Partaking in positive experiences, whether new or old, may alleviate some of the pressure and take the focus off any unhealthy mindset and behaviours. At the very least it is a good distraction from it.

I have learnt that I do not always have the answers and I do not always know what's best.

I have learnt to lean on others and ask for their help. Talking to friends and family and participating in local support groups are all essential for my wellbeing. Local community resources are free or very affordable and are there to be used.

I have learnt to support my loved one but not assist him in any way that is detrimental to our wellbeing.

I have learnt how to be grateful, compassionate and understanding.

I have learnt to be kind to everyone especially those who are unkind to me as they need it the most.

These are just a few of the lessons that I have learnt from my loved one experiencing dual diagnosis. I have purposefully left one until last and believe that it is my most valuable lesson that I can share.

I have learnt to always have Hope.

We all know what it is and our definition may differ slightly. It was only recently that I sat down and really thought about it and I discovered its importance and just how huge and powerful this small word is.

Hope is as important as air, food and water. It is essential to live.

Hope is the little glimmer of light that you can see when in the darkest tunnel.

Hope is that little tiny voice in your head telling you to try a little harder.

Hope is the ability to push through that most difficult of situations.

Hope is free and the most precious gift you could ever give someone.

Family member

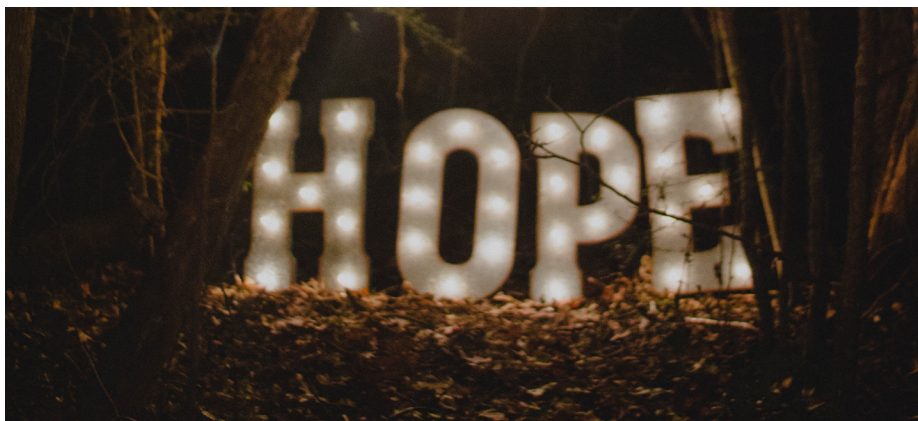


Photo by Ron Smith on Unsplash

It wasn't until I stopped using drugs that I realised how insidious my mental health condition was. I knew it was there, and that it was the primary reason why I started using drugs – to make myself feel better/nor-normal... whatever that is, and they worked for a while. That is until they didn't, and they became the problem. And it stayed that way for the next 10 years. A cyclical battle with addiction and mental health, both feeding on and off each other.

I remember, when I was about 10 days drug-free and in rehab, saying to my Support Worker that I felt like I was having major anxiety bordering on panic attacks. I'd never felt that before – depression was always, and still is, my thing. He calmly suggested that maybe I hadn't had anxiety before, because I was stoned all the time. For the most part, he was right.

The truth is though that, from my teen years, along with depression I'd had anxiety, in particular social anxiety. And I used drugs, including alcohol, to feel worthy and relevant in social situations. Unfortunately the other things that happened were compromised values, boundaries and the inability to stop or even regulate my using.

Finally, I stopped using drugs over 5 years ago, and the full nature of my mental health revealed itself. I went into major depression for a long, long time. And I still have it... not as badly or as frequently, but enough to still be on significant doses of anti-depressants. I don't know if it will ever leave me, but I can say categorically my life, free of drugs, is much richer and more meaningful. It doesn't matter whether I used drugs because of my mental health or the other way around. I'm drug free because I chose recovery, and I'm more able to manage my mental health because I'm drug free.

Anonymous

Gambling Family

A first of its kind in Australia, InFocus Gambling is delivered through a peer support framework, facilitated by professionals who have also been impacted by gambling.

The program's purpose is to reduce gambling harm and stigma for families and friends, with the opportunity for people to connect through their shared experiences. We also run monthly support groups.

Support Groups

Our support groups are an opportunity to connect with others who are having similar experiences.

Many of our support groups have guest speakers and presenters as well as special topics. Check our website for the details (dates, times, locations) and our Facebook page for guests and topics at each group.

Call our helpline for enquiries or bookings for any of the programs, including counselling, or go to www.familydrughelp.org.au for further information.

 1300 660 068



Interpreter service available

 fdh@sharc.org.au

Carers Can Ask

Did you know that there is a resource for carers who are supporting a family member, loved one or friend who is struggling with substance use and MH issues –this is sometimes referred to as Dual Diagnosis. The resource is called "Carers can ask".

It's primarily focused on the kinds of questions a carer can ask a MH service when their loved one is receiving care from a MH service (Focused in the NE Metro area of Melbourne, but can be used elsewhere). The same questions can be asked of any service supporting your loved one. Use the CCA resource – its got a list of resources relevant to Victoria context at the back of the resource.

<https://www.svhm.org.au/our-services/departments-and-services/n/nexus/carers-can-ask>

Privacy is not a barrier – you can and should be provided with information.

Useful Links

The following sites offer information and support for people with dual diagnoses and their families:

- www.dualdiagnosis.org.au
- www.wellways.org.au
- www.firststep.org.au
- www.asmile.org.au/substance-use
- www.beyondblue.org.au
- www.adf.org.au