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Supporting a loved one after drug rehab ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I want to thank you and Columbia for this wonderful service! I have been browsing your archives for some help, here is the situation: I want to know what I can do to support my significant other when he is released from Drug Rehabilitation. Please help me!

Sincerely,
Keeping Clean After Rehab

Answer

Dear Keeping Clean After Rehab,

When your significant other (SO) comes home from rehab, the best thing you can do is be supportive. Of course, the difficulty lies in defining "supportive." You can begin to figure out how you're going to be supportive before your SO leaves the rehab center. It may even be helpful if you outline what you will and will not do when he first comes home. You may want to consider contacting the rehab directly, as some treatment facilities have a contact person who can help you with the process. Thinking in advance about what you can and will do should prove helpful, but you should also allow for some of the less predictable things that might happen for each of you.

One of the best ways to figure out what your significant other needs in this situation is to ask. While this may sound basic, it could actually prove challenging. His time in rehab may have been one of the most difficult things he's experienced. You may have questions about the experience and he may or may not want to answer them. Can the two of you agree on what will be discussed and what won't? Can you each talk about how you will communicate with the other in both easy and difficult situations? How will you know if he needs some space or needs you close? Beyond your relationship, what does he need from friends or family members you both know? Clearly, the list of questions could be quite long and now may be the time for you to create your own list.

You can and should be there to listen to his problems, fears, and plans for getting through this tough time — all while doing what you can to reduce social and environmental stressors. One big

way you can be supportive is by not drinking, smoking pot, or doing any other drugs — even if you are able to do these things in moderation. You can offer to take him to post-rehab meetings or you may even want to join a support group yourself. It's good to hear what others who have been through a similar experience have to say. That way, you won't feel so alone and you can gain insight. Through all of this, remember to take care of yourself. Compromising your own self-care will impact your mental and physical health, not to mention your ability to care for others.

The first few weeks and months will probably be the hardest. Your SO will most likely go through periods of emotional ups and downs as he continues to confront his addiction. He may be angry at times (at himself, at you, at others, or just angry), sad at other times, or even may seem manipulative or distant. If you are genuine in your concern, share as many of your reactions, fears, and feelings as possible. Be sure to point out any and all positives, and offer hope and compassion. There isn't a "one size fits all" roadmap to rehab or sobriety. By taking the time to ask this question, you've already shown that you are willing to navigate some tough terrain with your significant other.

Alice!

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