

Support in recovery from addiction is vital. President Gordon B. Hinckley emphasized the value of support through having “a friend in the Church to whom you can constantly turn, who will walk beside you, who will answer your questions, who will understand your problems” (*Ensign*, Oct. 2006, 4). In addition he said: “I want to say to you, look for your friends among members of the Church. Band together and strengthen one another. And when the time of temptation comes, you will have someone to lean on, someone to bless you and give you strength when you need it. That is what this Church is for, so that we can help one another in our times of weakness to stand on our feet, tall and straight and true and good” (Eugene Oregon Regional Conference, September 15, 1996).

President James E. Faust (1920-2007) wrote: “We can go to others for help. To whom can we go? Elder Orson F. Whitney (1855–1931) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles asked and answered this question: ‘To whom do we look, in days of grief and disaster, for help and consolation? . . . They are men and women who have suffered, and out of their experience in suffering they bring forth the riches of their sympathy and condolences as a blessing to those now in need. Could they do this had they not suffered themselves?’ ” (*Ensign*, Feb. 2006, 3).

Living in recovery requires absolute honesty. However, denial, self-deception, and isolation are hallmarks of addictive behavior. These traits make it difficult to achieve lasting and stable progress in recovery without the support and perspective of others. It is important for an addict to enlist the help of appropriate and effective support people as soon as possible. “By being humble and honest and calling upon God and others for help, you can overcome your addictions through the Atonement of Jesus Christ” (*A Guide to Addiction Recovery and Healing*, vi; hereafter referred to as *Guide*).

Valuable Sources of Support for Addicts and Family Members

Heavenly Father, the Savior, and the Holy Ghost are our greatest sources of support. Recovery and healing are made possible through the Atonement of Jesus Christ. In addition the Lord often works through men and women to bless the lives of His children. All who participate in the addiction recovery program find that they are following the Lord’s counsel to “be faithful . . . succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees” (D&C 81:5).

As addicts work to apply the 12 steps of recovery, seeking necessary support from others, they will benefit from the sources listed below.

1. **Recovery meetings** provide support in a group setting. Participants include LDS Family Service missionaries, facilitators experienced in recovery, and others who are practicing recovery principles. In these meetings, newcomers hear participants describe how they apply recovery principles and practices in daily living. The sharing of personal recovery experiences encourages action toward recovery and fosters hope that recovery is obtainable. Every person attending recovery support group meetings is tangible evidence that this process leads to freedom from the bondage of addiction and to a happier way of life.
2. **A support person**, experienced in 12-step recovery, is especially qualified to help because of their own emergence from denial and self-deception. This emergence enables them to recognize the dishonesty that traps others affected by addiction. A support person helps those in recovery put their “lives into perspective and avoid exaggerating or minimizing [their] accountability” (*Guide*, 29). Both the giver and receiver of support are blessed with growth in their own recovery. This reciprocal opportunity to give and receive support is one of the core benefits of participating in the Addiction Recovery Program and is powerful in preventing relapse.
3. **Ecclesiastical support** in the process of recovery is essential. “[We] should not be reluctant to encourage [the addict] to turn to the Lord’s authorized servants” (*Guide*, 71). Never forget or underestimate the power of ecclesiastical stewardship. “While only the Lord can forgive sins, these priesthood leaders (Bishops and Stake and Mission Presidents) play a critical role in the process of [healing and] repentance” (*True to the Faith*, 134).
4. **Family members** can most effectively be a source of support by offering love and acceptance, and by applying the same 12 steps to their own lives. “Virtually everyone living in these perilous times [will] benefit by learning and applying gospel principles” as outlined in the *Guide* (*Guide*, 71). On a cautionary note, disclosures of personal inventories are not shared with immediate family members or anybody who might be adversely affected by hearing it.
5. **Professional counselors** are often sources of insight and perspective when dealing with addiction. When selecting professional help, it is important to select someone who is supportive of gospel principles as well as 12-step recovery.

Participants will have different starting points when seeking support in recovery from addiction. Regardless of the way they start, as they attend recovery support meetings, participants are blessed to be in an environment where the seed of recovery can be planted in their hearts.

Choosing a Support Person

The LDS Family Services Addiction Recovery Program, like all other 12-step recovery programs, does not assign people to give support. Asking for support is a personal decision. Initially the newcomer participates in recovery meetings, and prayerfully seeks to identify someone he or she thinks would be an effective support person. Once a person is identified, the newcomer approaches them and asks for support in working through the steps. The process may need to be repeated before the right match is found. Encourage the newcomer to continue these efforts until an appropriate support person agrees to provide support.

The *Guide* cautions: “Use great care and wisdom when selecting someone other than a priesthood leader. Do not share . . . sensitive information with individuals you suspect might extend improper guidance, provide misinformation, or have **difficulty maintaining confidences**. [A support person] must be extremely trustworthy in both word and deed” (*Guide*, 30). Ideally, an effective support person is someone who has personal practical experience in doing each of the steps and is fully active in the Church. Specifically, it is essential that this person has actually written a fourth-step inventory, read that inventory to another person in the fifth step, and made or is making ninth-step restitution. These are essential demonstrations of a personal commitment to stable, long-term recovery. “By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold, he will confess them and forsake them” (D&C 58:43).

A support person who has emerged from addiction can have empathy for the emotional pathway the newcomer is traveling. They “have a message of hope for other addicts . . . who are willing to consider a spiritual approach to changing their lives. . . [They] will share this message best through [their] efforts to serve others” (*Guide*, 71). The newcomer senses the empathy and recognizes the experience of the support person and becomes willing to follow the support person’s example by using the tools of recovery. In turn, the use of these tools invites the healing power of the Atonement into the newcomer’s life.

Many recovery issues are gender-specific. As addicts begin recovery, they are usually physically, emotionally, and spiritually vulnerable. In order to avoid developing an inappropriate relationship, the addict must choose a support person of the same gender.

Qualities of Effective Support

1. **Active participation in personal recovery** is the most fundamental aspect of providing effective support. Your suggestions and support are only as credible as your personal study, writing, and application of each step. “In your enthusiasm to help others, be sure to keep a balance between sharing the message and working on your own program.” (*Guide*, 72). Daily use of the tools of the program sets an example that is far more important than any counsel you will ever share with the newcomer. Your support must be consistent with this program of recovery.
2. **Humility** is a key characteristic of an effective support person. “There is no place in your new life for ego or any sense of superiority. Never forget where you have come from and how you have been rescued by the grace of God” (*Guide*, 72). “As you serve others, you will maintain humility by focusing on the gospel principles and practices you have learned” (*Guide*, 71).
3. **Respecting the agency of others** is a basic element of effective support. “Don’t give advice or try to fix them in any way. Simply inform them of the program and the spiritual principles that have blessed your life” (*Guide*, 71). Offering suggestions about principles and practices that may be helpful demonstrates respect for a person’s sacred agency.
4. **Respecting yourself and your personal commitments** fosters stability in your recovery and promotes effective support of others. Your agreement to act as a support person does not entitle the newcomer unlimited access to your time and resources. Honoring commitments to one’s family, the Church, professional endeavors, personal time, etc., sets an example of the importance of healthy boundaries.
5. **Selfless service** requires giving without expecting anything in return from those you support. Avoid falling prey to seeking praise, admiration, loyalty, or other emotional rewards from those you serve. “Be sure to give freely, not expecting a particular result” (*Guide*, 71).
6. **Patience** is a requirement when supporting others. Newcomers may repeat unhealthy behaviors and be slow to adopt the principles and practices of recovery. Perhaps the addict is not yet ready to move forward. “Most of us had to ‘hit bottom’ before we were ready to study and apply these principles” (*Guide*, 71). Remember that the journey of recovery is unique for every individual, including the support person and the newcomer.
7. **Gentle, yet firm encouragement** is consistent with the Lord’s pattern. Effective support comes “by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile” (Doctrine & Covenants 121: 41-42).
8. **Placing God before yourself** must be constantly in your mind as you offer support. “When you do something for someone else or share the message of hope and recovery, you must not allow another person to become too dependent on you. Your responsibility is to encourage others who struggle to turn to Heavenly Father and the Savior for guidance and power.” (*Guide*, 71). Your role is to share your experience, faith, and hope by assisting the newcomer through the same 12-step process that helped you access God’s grace.
9. **Prayer** is essential as you give support. Each time you offer support, ask the Lord which principles or practices of the 12-step program will be most helpful for the current needs. “Be prayerful as you consider ways to serve, seeking always to be led by the Holy Ghost. If you are willing, you will find many opportunities to share the spiritual principles you have learned” (*Guide*, 71).
10. **Testifying of truth** as you have experienced it in recovery, is one of the most powerful support tools available. “Tell some of your story to let them know that you can relate” (*Guide*, 71). Bear testimony of our Savior and of his healing power. “[Your] message is that God is a God of miracles, just as He has always been (see Moroni 7:29). Your life proves that. You are becoming a new person through the Atonement of Jesus Christ . . . Sharing your testimony of His mercy and His grace is one of the most important services you can offer” (*Guide*, 71).
11. **The ability to keep confidences** and protect the privacy of others is an essential principle of effective support. Anonymity and confidentiality are core principles in the addiction recovery program that cannot be sacrificed.