When someone you care about won't seek support

Most people who use drugs use them only occasionally for a short time in their lives and don't go on to develop any serious issues. For some people though, drug use can become a problem and can sometimes lead to **dependence.** Find out more about the signs that might indicate a person has developed a **dependence** on crystal **methamphetamine** ('ice').

It can be hard to see someone you care about using ice, especially if it negatively affects their life, work or relationships. So, what do you do when you've raised your concerns but your loved one chooses not to seek support?

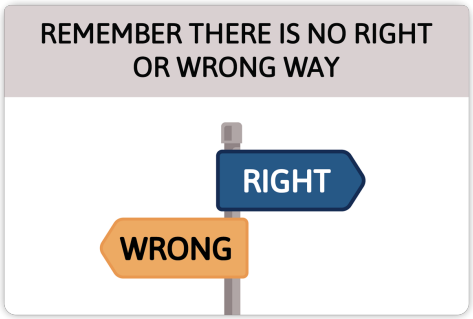
It's important to first understand that there are many reasons why someone may not want to seek support.

Sometimes people don't think their use of ice is a problem, or they're too embarrassed to seek help, or they don't believe there is anything that can help. At other times, people may find it hard to imagine getting through the day without using ice, and the thought of quitting or seeking help is too overwhelming.

Although the responsibility for seeking help lies with the person who is using ice, you can play an important role in letting them know about your worries, keeping the communication channels open and letting them know what help options are available. **How and how much you help your loved one is up to you.**

Here are some ideas that might help you approach the situation and nudge your loved one towards the support they need:

Remember there is no right or wrong way



It's important to know that there isn't a specific way that these situations should be managed and any approach you take is going to have advantages and disadvantages. There are many tips that may help you approach the situation in an informed and calm manner. However, everyone's situation is different, so what works for one person may not necessarily work for another. Understand that you are doing the best that you can and seek additional support and the input of experts/doctors when needed.

Do your research

Gather information to understand the effects of ice and why people use it (e.g. to cope with stress, **anxiety** or problems). This will help you gain a better understanding of the potential problems your loved one may be experiencing and the reasons why they may be using ice.

Start a dialogue

One of the first steps is to just start a general conversation with your loved one. Remember, they are still your loved one in there. Be mindful of timing these conversations so they are not when the person is **intoxicated** or in **withdrawal.** In these conversations it's important to show you care about them and are there to support them. Here are some tips about the best way to start conversations about ice.

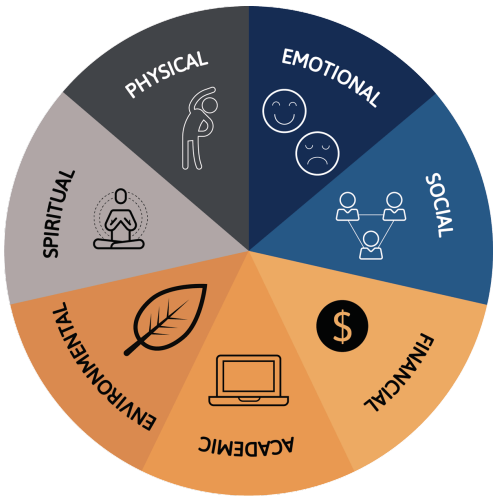
- **Play the long game.** It may take a number of conversations, over time, until someone is ready to start talking about their ice use with you and then a bit more time for them to start thinking about getting support. Without pressuring them, be consistent and persistent. This will keep the communication channels open, so that even if initial conversations aren't moving them towards getting help, you have left the door open for them to come back and talk some more. Given that you want them to trust you, how you broach these conversations will be important.
- **Be vulnerable.** You don't want to make the conversation about you, but sometimes sharing some of your own hard times and how you got through them can make it easier for your loved one to do the same.
- **Talk about life, and how their ice use is affecting you.** Helping them understand the impact their ice use is having on your life and theirs can assist in building motivation to change things.
- **Talk about harm reduction.** If they are going to continue using ice, then encourage them to do so safely. Suggest they consider staying hydrated, take time out to rest and avoid using other substances (e.g. alcohol or other drugs) at the same time as ice.
- **Try not to be judgemental.** It's important to understand how things feel from their point of view, rather than to judge or criticise them for using ice. Let them know they're not alone, that there's help available, and there's no shame in seeking help.
- **Mix it up.** If your approach isn't working, try changing your communication style. If you're usually firm, try being softer. If you're normally more sensitive, try a direct approach. Another option is to talk about other things that might be important, or that might be concerning the person using ice that don't actually involve ice. People may be willing to seek some treatment or accept help for mood or stress, particularly if they are using ice as a way of coping with these things.
- **Be humble**. Is someone other than you who might be better placed to have this conversation? Is there someone who the person might be more comfortable talking to?

Stay connected anyway

Don't make your friendship/relationship conditional on them seeking support. It's important to keep the lines of communication open. Encourage them to engage in activities with you and others that don't involve alcohol or other drugs. If they don't want to talk about their drug

use, you can always ask them how you can assist them with other things in their life.

Take care of yourself



It's normal to feel stressed, anxious and worried about your loved one. The process of supporting someone before, during and after treatment for ice use can be very lengthy and distressing. It can also affect your involvement in your usual activities like work, friendships, family relationships and hobbies. There are confidential support services for family and friends of people who use ice that can also provide information and advice.

Think about your own needs and set boundaries if necessary

Putting your needs aside to support a love one can take a toll on your mental and physical health in the long term. Sometimes you may need to prioritise your needs and set boundaries as this will allow you to support the person using ice while still taking care of yourself. It's also okay if helping them becomes too much for you and if you need to take a step back.

Try to stay involved in your usual activities as much as possible as well as staying connected with family and friends. This will help you to manage the stress that comes with supporting someone.

Following these tips will help you show your loved one that you care about them and that you are willing to help them get support when they're ready. It's important to remember that people are in charge of their own life. The responsibility of seeking help and support lies with them. So be patient and present until they're ready to make a change.

KEY SOURCES

Beyond Blue. (2018). *When someone you care about won't seek support.* Retrieved from: https://www.beyondblue.org.au/personal-best/pillar/supporting-others/when-someone-you-care-about-wont-seek-support

Jensen, C. D., Cushing, C. C., Aylward, B. S., Craig, J. T., Sorell, D. M., & Steele, R. G. (2011). Effectiveness of motivational interviewing interventions for adolescent substance use behavior change: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 79*(4), 433–440. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0023992

Positive Choices. (2016). How to help a friend or family member with a drug problem. National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, University of New South Wales