

4.8 Constructive response to worried parents

Findings Concerned parents and others close to a substance misuser can learn how to engage them in treatment. Even if they resist, the relatives feel better and healthier.

Community Reinforcement and Family Training (CRAFT) aims to give relatives and partners the confidence and skills to influence an adult's substance misuse and their willingness to enter treatment. Having been shown effective in relation to alcoholics, CRAFT has now been tested in relation to drug misusers. CRAFT's community reinforcement elements help relatives to foster fulfilling events and activities in a drug user's life which are incompatible with drug use. It also aims to improve social skills and quality of life, develop strategies to prevent drug use, and prepare relatives to rapidly initiate treatment. To facilitate this the study provided its own fast-track referral and community reinforcement treatment.

303 relatives/friends contacted the project. 62 met the criteria of a close, recent relationship with the target user and completed assessment. Nearly all were women, mostly mothers or wives of male users. The main problem drugs were cannabis and stimulants. 12 CRAFT sessions were scheduled over up to six months. During this period two-thirds of the drug users entered treatment, completing on average 8 of 12 sessions. The intervention was particularly successful for parents and children, far less so for wives and husbands. Relatives reported significantly improved emotional and physical wellbeing (average scores dropped into the normal range) to a degree which did not significantly differ whether or not their drug user had entered treatment. For drug users who entered it, the treatment reduced drug use and improved emotional wellbeing.

In context British drug and alcohol services have included families and friends within their remit for many years, but this is the first evaluation of a systematic approach for drug users. The best known alternative is the Johnson Intervention; family and others affected by a substance user plan a meeting during which they confront them with the damage they have caused and threaten consequences if they continue to resist treatment. In one study CRAFT was twice as effective in engaging problem drinkers in treatment. Again, it worked best with parents and children rather than spouses.

It cannot be assumed that results will be as good in normal practice as in the featured study. Relatives were highly selected and motivated and in close contact with the target drug user, many of whom were probably living with their parents or partially dependent on them, giving the parents extra leverage. Therapists were specially trained, followed a detailed manual, and were intensely supervised. They had opted to try a leading edge therapy, so may also have been unusually keen, and they had reserved, fast-access treatment slots. Many of the drug users with whom the intervention worked had been through previous treatments. Given easy and free access to a new approach based on improving their quality of life, some may have re-entered treatment even without the intervention.

Practice implications CRAFT is a promising way of responding to the many calls drug and alcohol services receive from the relatives and friends of drinkers and drug users, one which avoids a potentially risky confrontation. That it worked best with close parent-child dyads suggests a potential for use with the families of young drug users. However, all concerned risk disillusion if, finally persuaded to seek treatment, the user finds this unavailable or inappropriate. Services could avoid this by planning for rapid entry into treatment of what experience will show to be a certain percentage of targeted problem users. Continuing support for the relative after treatment entry is likely to help prevent drop out and improve effectiveness. Though many of the UK's addicts have lost touch with their families, many will have still been in touch early in their drug use/addiction careers, potentially giving CRAFT an early intervention role.

Featured studies Meyers R.J., et al. "Community reinforcement and family training (CRAFT): engaging unmotivated drug users in treatment." *Journal of Substance Abuse*: 1999, 10(3), p. 291–308. Copies: apply DrugScope.

Additional reading Meyers R.J., et al. *Clinical guide to alcohol treatment: the community reinforcement approach*. Guildford Press, 1995. Copies through bookshops.

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