

living well.

Life strategies for
family, whānau, and
friends of people
using alcohol and
other drugs.



in association with



How do you care for yourself when faced with the impact of a family, whānau member, or friend's addiction?

- Reading this booklet is a great start. It may not answer all your questions but it will give you some ideas.
- It contains details of places where you can get further information and support.
- Families and whānau come in all shapes and sizes – families may be people related by blood ties, friendship, or other close relationships.
- Relationships with family, whānau and friends are important so it's worthwhile keeping these connections strong.



Substance use and mental health.

You might be confused about what's going on for your family, whānau member, or friend. Feeling this way is really natural. You might wonder if there is a mental health problem and other times think their behavior is purely substance use related. It's complicated, sometimes even specialists find it difficult to know what's really going on. Any accurate picture of your family, whānau member, or friend's health needs should, where possible, involve a professional assessment from an appropriate service like your local addiction or mental health service.

Call the Alcohol Drug Helpline 0800 787 797 for information about these services in your area.

The Mental Health Foundation is a good source of information for family, whānau and friends who are concerned about their loved ones mental health.

Visit www.mentalhealth.org.nz to find out more.

CONTENTS

Being around someone using alcohol and other drugs	Page 5
Putting yourself first	Page 7-8
What's going on for you	Page 9-10
It helps to talk	Page 11
Who can I talk to?	Page 12-13
Talking to professionals	Page 14-15
Looking after yourself, family, and whānau	Page 16-21
Understanding the process of change	Page 22-35
Living your life	Page 37-39
Services and mental health problems	Page 40

Being around someone using alcohol or other drugs can be really stressful.

There are a lot of emotions related to this experience. You may feel ashamed and blame yourself for your family, whānau member, or friend's substance use. Your mental and physical wellbeing can suffer and other important relationships in your life- both personal and professional- can be damaged. Grief, health complaints, and time off work is common. Identifying your feelings and finding an outlet to express those feelings is important for your wellbeing.

Check out Kina's website www.kina.org.nz. This is a useful online resource providing family members with advice and strategies. The Kina site hosts a forum where you can read stories from family and whānau members who have addiction problems in their families. You can also anonymously write and post your own story.

www.kina.org.nz/you-are-not-alone

Living with an addict is something I never thought I would do, you make excuses for them, you cover for them.

You are alone because it is not something you can talk about with others, you feel ashamed.

jane

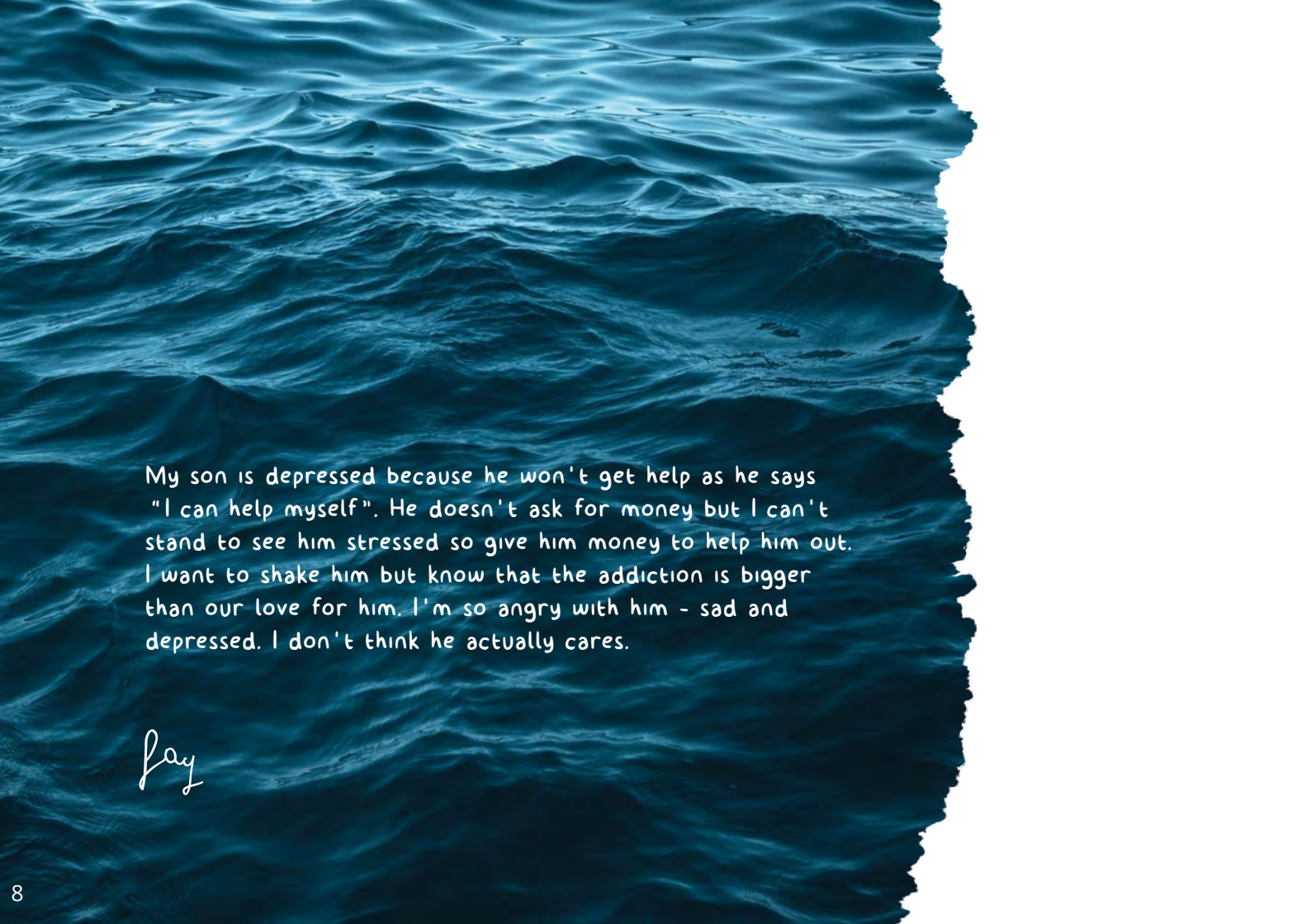
Putting yourself first.

Perhaps you've picked up this book with the idea that you'll find some answers for the problems your family, whānau member, or friend's substance use causes. The reality is that encouraging change in others is difficult. It is much more helpful to focus on changes you can make to improve your daily life.

Understanding the impact of a family, whānau member, or friend's behaviour will help you maintain or recover a sense of wellbeing and strengthen your ability to cope. Seeking support and learning to put boundaries in place will enable you to focus on your own life while encouraging your family, whānau member or friend to take responsibility for his/her choices around alcohol and other drugs.

Remember the three C's!

- You didn't CAUSE the problem
- You can't CONTROL the problem
- You can't CURE the problem



My son is depressed because he won't get help as he says "I can help myself". He doesn't ask for money but I can't stand to see him stressed so give him money to help him out. I want to shake him but know that the addiction is bigger than our love for him. I'm so angry with him - sad and depressed. I don't think he actually cares.

Jay


What's going on for you?

Addiction to alcohol and other drugs is really common. Lots of people struggle with their family, whānau, or friend's substance use and the behaviour often associated with it. It can leave you stressed out and worried, often coping in silence for years with the mistaken belief that there is nothing you can do. It takes courage to look at painful and confusing issues. Congratulations on picking up this book!

It is common for family members to be experiencing:

- Grief
- Shame
- Poor or disturbed sleep
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Irritability
- Gastric or other physical ailments
- Feelings of helplessness
- Loss of hope





It was such a relief to talk to someone and realise that my family wasn't the only one and that other people were going through the same things.

june

It helps to talk.

You don't have to struggle on in silence. There are others who get what you are going through and who can provide non-judgmental support and help you find resources. Being able to share your feelings with others, being accepted and receiving understanding and support is comforting. You are not alone.

Need to talk to someone today?

Even if you can't share your feelings with someone close, you can call the helpful people at the Alcohol Drug Helpline **0800 787 797 24** hours a day for free confidential information.



Who can I talk to?

You can talk to another family, whānau member, or friend. It's good to seek out the support of people who are there for you and care. Letting friends and other family members know what you're going through and how you are feeling will leave you feeling less alone.

Different people can help in different ways. Sometimes family and friends are too close and you feel like you need someone outside your family to discuss things with.

Helpful people:

- are able to listen
- understand the situation
- don't take sides
- support your decision making
- help you work out what to do next
- do not give advice without being asked
- offer practical help e.g. babysitting



Join a group.

Seek out a support group today - It is likely that support groups for family, whānau and friends of people with addiction problems are meeting now in your community. Check out peer support groups like Al-Anon to meet other people who are dealing with similar situations to your own.

AL-ANON: 0508 425 2666

Al-Anon offers hope and recovery to all people affected by the alcohol use of a loved one or friend. Ring this number to find meetings and contacts in your area.





I think a belief that's out there is I can't do anything until the person I love does something- which simply isn't true.

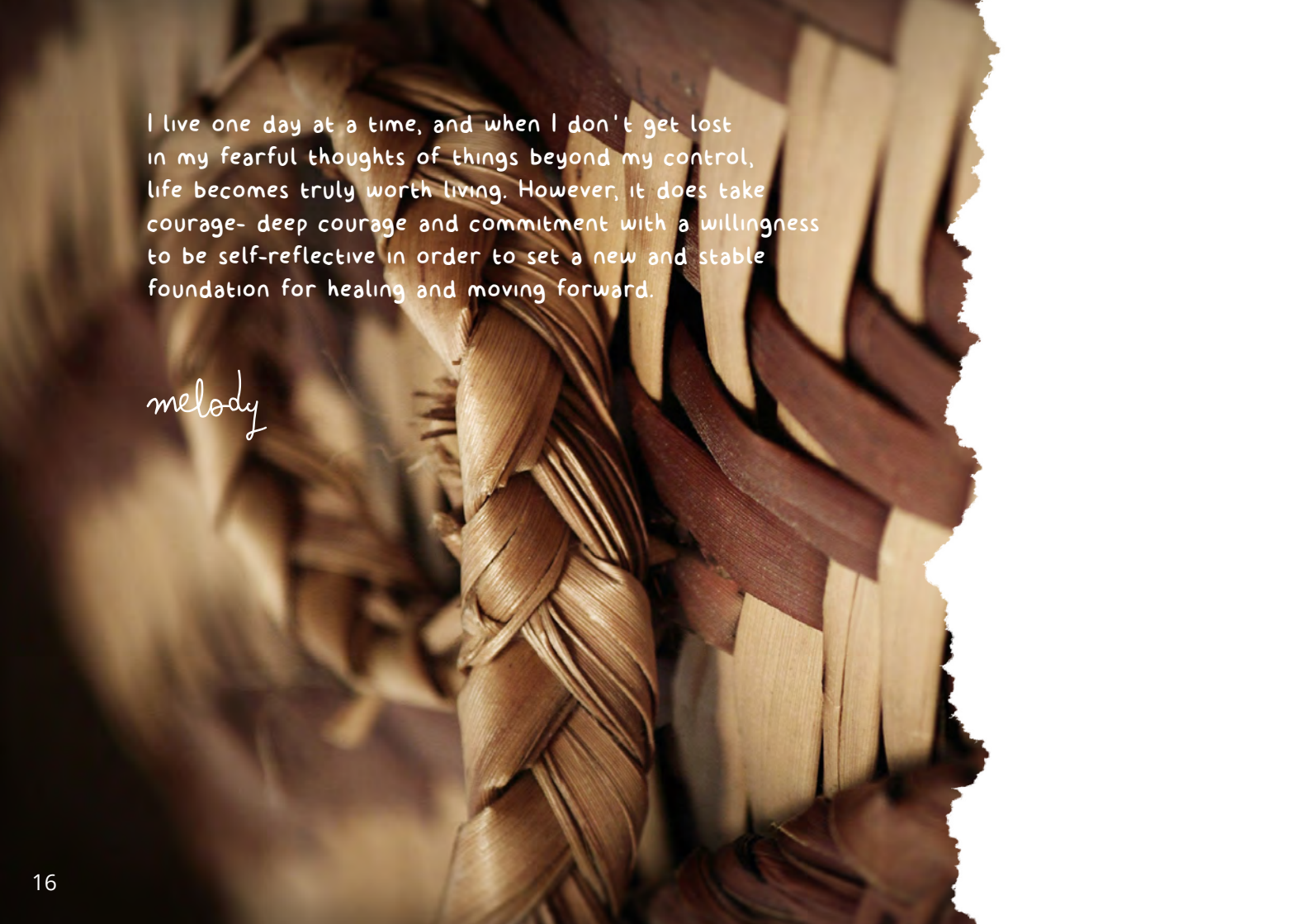
o r o

Talking to professionals.

The person you are worried about may not be ready for professional help. This is not unusual. However, you can make a decision to focus on finding services that meet your own needs and provide you with resources and information.

Making a decision to talk to a professional, whether they're a counsellor, therapist, or perhaps your G.P, can be a really positive step.

Talking things through with your G.P may also help you get access to services to help with your own low mood or feelings of anxiety. These services are called primary mental health services.



I live one day at a time, and when I don't get lost in my fearful thoughts of things beyond my control, life becomes truly worth living. However, it does take courage- deep courage and commitment with a willingness to be self-reflective in order to set a new and stable foundation for healing and moving forward.

melody

You can look after yourself, family and whānau even if the person drinking or using drugs isn't ready to change.

If your family, whānau member, or friend's alcohol or other drug use leaves you feeling hopeless it's time to shift your focus away from them and start caring for yourself and the rest of your family.

The wellbeing of children who may be affected by a parent or caregiver's substance use or mental health problem needs to be prioritised over the needs of any adults. If you have concerns about how children are being affected, contact a local child and family focused service to discuss your concerns or call any of the following numbers:

- Parent Help – 0800 568 856
- Are You OK? – 0800 456 450 (Family Violence Information Line)

Family services vary from region to region. The Family Services Directory has a list of support agencies in your area

www.familyservices.govt.nz/directory



I realised we'd stopped doing social things together and that as family we'd stopped functioning a long time ago. When I remembered there were others in the family that also needed looking after it made it easier to let go of focussing on the problem all the time.

Sue



Looking after your family and whānau.

You may have become so wrapped up in focusing on 'the problem,' that other important relationships within your family and whānau have become neglected, or strained. Shifting your focus allows you to care for the other significant people in your life and can help to maintain a balanced perspective.

Strategies to lessen stress on the family and whānau can include:

- sticking to family routines
- staying positive and having hope
- taking up offers of help
- having a laugh/doing fun things together
- celebrating the good things like birthdays
- solving one problem at a time.





Positive support increases family strength and reduces feelings of isolation, embarrassment and guilt.

Who are your supports?

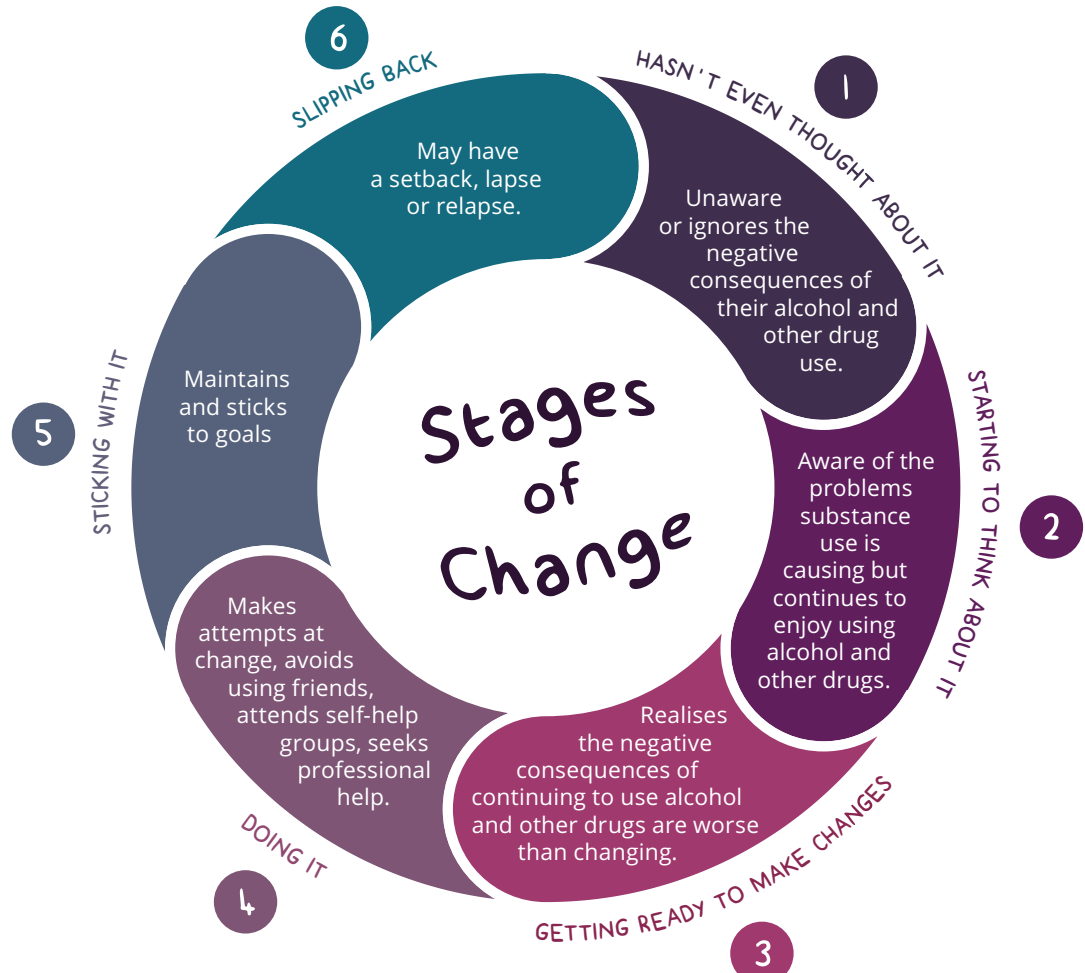
- Family
- Whānau
- Friends
- Support groups
- Sporting and recreation groups or clubs
- Church communities
- Agencies

Convinced nothing will ever change?

Remember - people with alcohol and other drug problems **CAN** and do change. It might take time and it is their decision to make, not yours. You might not be able to change them but **YOU** can change! You don't need to wait for the other person to get well before making positive changes yourself.

I know it is her life to live, her journey to take. I try really really really hard not to judge her for what she is doing, and to understand that she is addicted and probably doesn't realise what it looks like from the outside, but I'd be lying if I didn't say it made me sad and that I wished one day she would attempt sobriety.

beatrix




Understanding the stages of change.

If you are reading this, you're probably wanting your family, whānau member, or friend to make changes to their alcohol and other drug use.

Change is a challenging process for families and whānau. It can feel uncomfortable.

It is really helpful to understand that change is a process, not a straight line. People making changes usually go backwards and forwards before eventually getting there. This process of change is also similar for family, whānau and friends. Understanding the process of change that your family, whānau member or friend may go through can be really helpful to maintain realistic expectations.





At this stage she never admitted she was an alcoholic, she just thought she drank a bit too much. She convinced me this was true. She told me that she would control her drinking and things would get better.

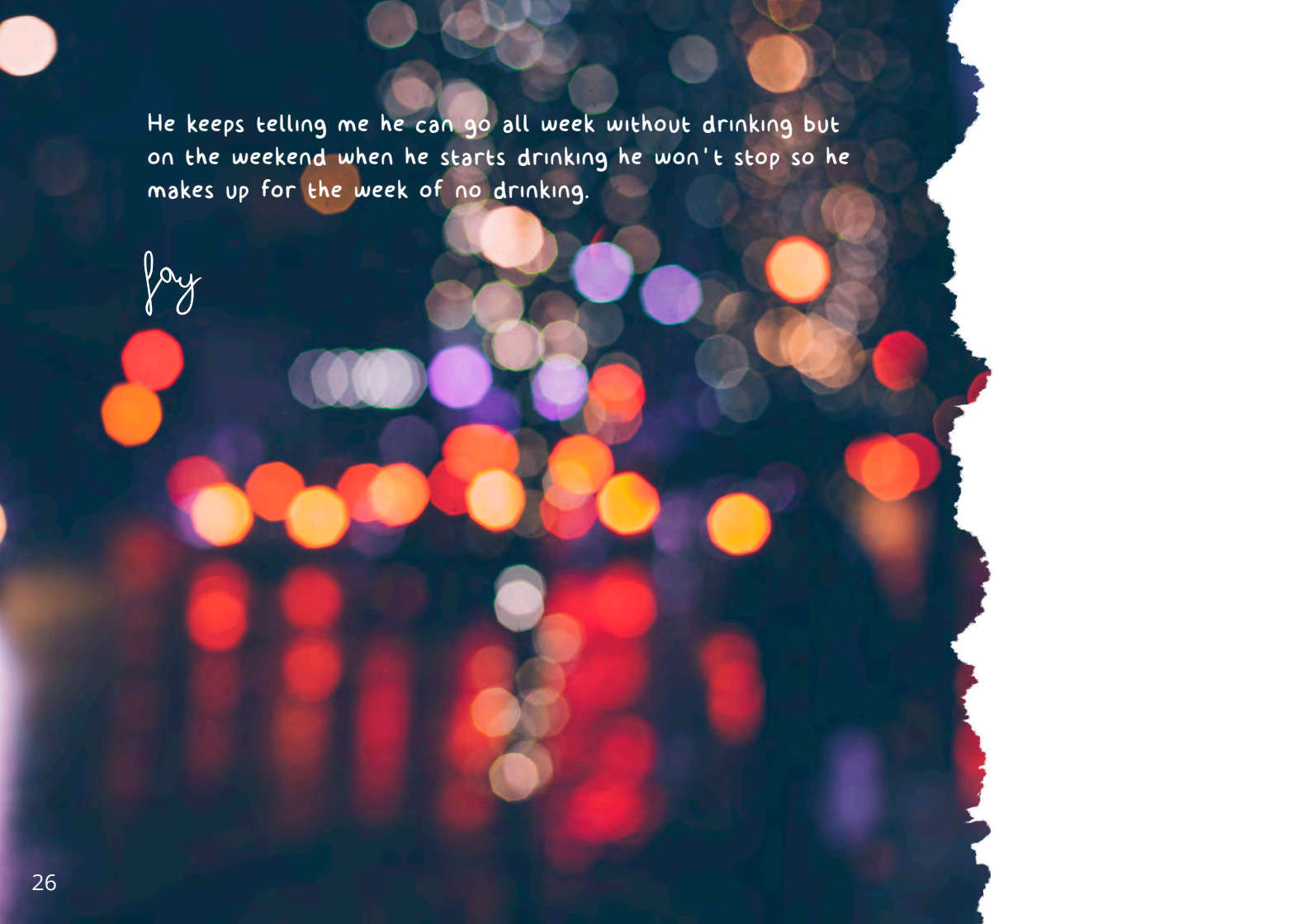
real



Unaware or ignores the negative consequences of their alcohol and other drug use.

Stage One - Hasn't even thought about it.

During this stage your family, whānau member, or friend will ignore or not even notice the negative consequences of their alcohol and other drug use focusing instead on what they enjoy about using substances. Attempting to discuss, argue about, or control their substance use at this stage is likely to be met with defensiveness and conflict. This is really frustrating to deal with, and places relationships under further strain. Accepting your family, whānau member, or friend isn't ready to change is key here. This doesn't mean rolling over and ignoring the problem though, just that at this stage your own health and wellbeing must come first.



He keeps telling me he can go all week without drinking but on the weekend when he starts drinking he won't stop so he makes up for the week of no drinking.

Jay




Aware of the problems substance use is causing but continues to enjoy using alcohol and other drugs.

Stage Two - Starting to think about it.

During this stage your family, whānau member, or friend will be able to see some of the problems their substance use is causing. Despite this, they continue to enjoy their use of alcohol and other drugs.

Paying attention to their growing doubts and looking for times when they are open to talking about this is helpful.



From our family, all my mother's siblings had addictions and they are now 42+ and have all (but one) given up their addictions. With my siblings, 3 out of 4 of us curbed our addictions and live fairly humdrum lives. We have successfully stopped the cycle because we wanted so much more for our kids than what we had.

julie



Realises the negative consequences of continuing to use alcohol and other drugs are worse than changing.

Stage Three - Getting ready to make changes.

The negative consequences of continuing to use alcohol and other drugs are now becoming obvious for your family, whānau member, or friend. Change occurs when the positives for change outweigh the positives for staying the same. Uncertainty can still be hanging around so it's really important to be supportive and encouraging of your family, whānau member, or friend's desire to make changes.



I realised I'd been focusing entirely on the problem, it wasn't until I was able to let go of what was wrong in our family and start to celebrate and build on the things that were ok that things started getting better.

beth

Arana



Makes attempts at change, avoids using friends, attends self-help groups, seeks professional help.

Stage Four - Doing it.

At this stage your family, whānau member or friend may be distancing themselves from drinking or drug using friends, attending support groups, or reaching out for professional help. In order to remain supportive and optimistic of any positive changes- however small- you need to be in good shape too. **One of the best ways to encourage change is taking care of yourself and other family and whānau members.** Living your life well inspires change.

Attempts at change may not always succeed but the key task here is to stick together and keep talking.

peter






Maintains and sticks to goals

Stage Five - Sticking with it.

You may have thought this stage would be the end of the story, only to discover this is really just the beginning. The fear of your family, whānau member or friend starting to use substances again is ever present, and early recovery from alcohol and other drugs seems like a full time job for everyone. Challenging situations will happen, it's helpful to remember to take extra care of yourself during these times. Celebrating the positive changes in your family and whānau, and reflecting on the benefits will help you and them appreciate how far you've all come.



It was good for a while then Christmas came and the whānau visited and the drinking started up again.

beth



May have a setback,
lapse or relapse.

Stage Six - Slipping back.

It's so frustrating to see your family, whānau member, or friend using again after doing so well. At this stage set backs are really common. They are part of the learning process. Think about changes you've made in your own life. Did these changes run smoothly or did you experience obstacles? Setbacks often happen when a person is not caring for themselves, or when something unexpected comes up. These times can provide your family, whānau member, or friend with an opportunity to learn more about themselves and return to recovery with increased insight. Being realistic helps you work together to plan for the unexpected.



Live your life.

Regardless of what stage your family, whānau member, or friend is at, your first responsibility is to look after yourself.

No matter where your family, whānau member, or friend is in the change process, you look after yourself and live your life. Remember, by doing this, you provide an example for others in your family and whānau. You are change in action.



Help is out there and available. It's ok to give yourself a break, start caring for yourself, and ask for help. There is a way to cope with the heart wrenching despair of these painful family dynamics we often feel we have to hide from the world. The journey through the darkness begins with you taking responsibility for your own wellness.

nathan



In an emergency on an airplane, when the oxygen mask drops you are advised to put your own mask on first before attending to others.

- Ⓛ **Live your life** - living your own life is the single most important thing you can do.
 - Ⓢ **Invest** - time and energy into other family/whānau members.
 - Ⓥ **Value** - positive times with family/whānau.
 - ⓔ **Enjoyment is the spice of life** - when was the last time you did something nice for yourself?
-
- Ⓛ **Laugh** - laughter is good medicine; do things you enjoy.
 - Ⓢ **Isolation feeds shame** - talk to someone today about how you are feeling.
 - Ⓢ **Fear is the enemy** - talk to someone to alleviate the fear.
 - ⓔ **Embrace change** - change is inevitable; learn to welcome it.

Services that can help when there are signs of mental health problems.

- If you believe your family, whānau member, or friend is experiencing mental health problems alongside their substance use, call your local mental health service and explain the circumstances. These services are usually part of your local hospital or District Health Board.
- Feelings of low mood, anxiety and agitation are mental health problems often associated with substance use.
- You can expect mental health services to take your concerns seriously. However, they may have other priorities and may not be able to see your family member immediately unless there is an emergency.

In an Emergency

- If your family, whānau member or friend is clearly distressed and you are concerned for their, or someone else's immediate safety, call mental health services and explain the emergency.
- Being unwell may include seeing or hearing things that others can't see or hear, believing that you or others are trying to hurt them, or feeling they want to end their life.
- Mental health services may call the police if the person is intoxicated or aggressive.
- Alternatively call the police directly on 111 as they may attend more quickly and will contact other services as they are needed.
- If you see or hear about a child who is in immediate danger contact the police on 111.



Call the helpful people at the Alcohol Drug Helpline **0800 787 797 24** hours a day for free confidential information.





*Whānau, we might not have it all together-
but together we have it all.*

Further support

The Alcohol Drug Helpline 0800 787 797

This helpline may know of specific services for families in your area, but are also able to talk directly to family, whānau and friends.

The Family Services Directory

Family services vary from region to region. The Family Services Directory has a list of support agencies in your area - www.familyservices.govt.nz/directory.

The Mental Health Foundation

This organisation is a good source of information for family, whānau members and friends who are concerned about mental health - www.mentalhealth.org.nz

AL-ANON: 0508 425 2666

Al-Anon offers support to all people affected by the alcohol use of a loved one or friend. Ring this number to find meetings and contacts in your area.

Supporting Families

A nationwide network of support for families of people with mental health and addiction problems - www.supportingfamilies.org.nz.

Subscribe to Kina's mailing list - www.kina.org.nz/mailling-list