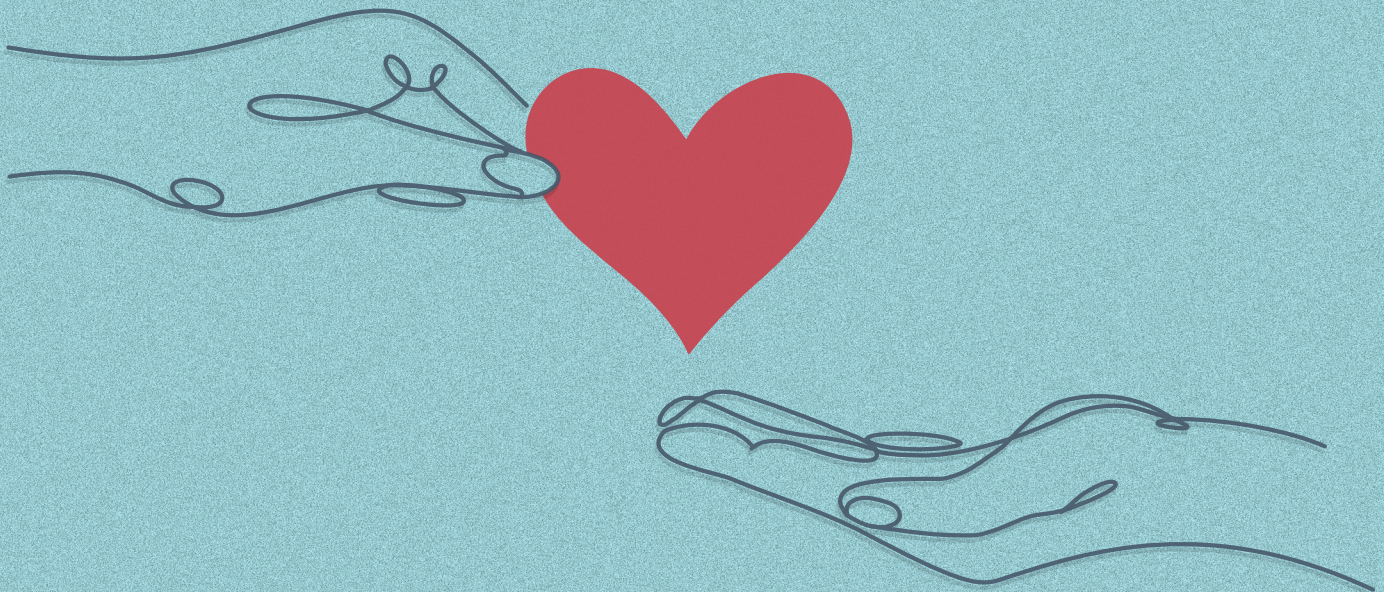


THE INVITATION TO CHANGE

A SHORT GUIDE

**Jeffrey Foote, PhD, Kenneth Carpenter, PhD,
and Carrie Wilkens, PhD**
with Stephanie Higgs



cmc: foundation for change

Each individual chapter of *A Short Guide* can be downloaded for free as a standalone PDF. These free downloads contain all the same text and exercises as the digital and print editions—the only difference is that they are free, to ensure that anyone who needs this information has access to it.

However, we do encourage you to purchase a print or digital edition if you are able to, so that you can support our work providing free and low-cost services to communities.

For more information and resources, check out the [reference page](#) at the end of this book.

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CHAPTER 2

Behaviors Make Sense



Understanding how your loved one's behavior makes sense to them invites connection and collaboration between you.

A New Perspective

We begin **Helping with Understanding** by exploring the idea that behaviors make sense. You can try out this idea on yourself with the following checklist. Check the items that apply to you when you ask yourself, "Is this something I need or would like in my life"?

Things I need/want in my life:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> To feel less or no anxiety | <input type="checkbox"/> To be able to unwind after a brutal week |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To not feel depressed | <input type="checkbox"/> To be able to focus and concentrate on important things in my life |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To feel good/happy | <input type="checkbox"/> To lose weight |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To feel engaged and not bored | <input type="checkbox"/> To be seen as funny |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To not suffer with physical pain | <input type="checkbox"/> To appreciate others |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To feel excited/inspired | <input type="checkbox"/> To have a satisfying sex life |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To have friends | <input type="checkbox"/> To get a reasonable amount of sleep |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To feel part of something | <input type="checkbox"/> To feel capable of taking on the challenges of each new day |



Now, consider these questions:

- ① Did you check at least one item? More?
- ② When you look at this list, do any of these “wants” not make sense?
- ③ Do any seem questionable, immoral, or unworthy of having as a goal?
- ④ If there was a guaranteed, reliable way to achieve the items you selected, would you be interested in it?

These wants and needs are exactly what substances provide for many people. Substances offer an answer to the struggles and longings that we all have, and much of the time, they work well. And the fact is, when behaviors serve a purpose (or lots of purposes), we repeat them. This is true even if the behavior also has a big downside.

It will help you to help your loved one if you can understand:

People don't use substances because they're crazy. They don't use substances because they're bad. They use substances because they get something that they like, want, or need out of them.

Many of the things that people get from using substances are understandable human wants or needs: to mellow out when we're anxious, to feel part of something, to feel less bored, to get to sleep, to relieve pain, to enjoy ourselves. If using substances was like putting their hand on a hot stove—a behavior that only causes pain, with no positive outcomes—they would have stopped and never used again.

Getting positive things from using substances is called reinforcement, and this process is made stronger by several features of substance use:

1. It is reliable,
2. It is immediate, and
3. It is in the person's control (not other people's control).

In other words, the person using knows what to expect, how quickly they'll feel it, and they get to choose where, when, and with who. Substances also impact



the body and the brain, and with increased tolerance, it can become uncomfortable or even painful to stop using. In other words, stopping using can initially feel punishing, rather than being immediately reinforced by positive feelings or sensations. These features of substance use make the behavior powerfully reinforcing—in other words, more likely to happen again.

The other truth is that *the downsides of using substances do not erase or cancel out what someone gets from using*. The reason someone uses and reasons they don't want to use can coexist and make sense all at the same time. Change can happen when the downsides of your loved one's use outweigh the benefits, and when they find other ways to get what they want and need. Keep reading and you will see what you can do to help tip the scales in the direction of change.

Why Behaviors Make Sense Matters

How can knowing that **behaviors make sense** impact your efforts to help?

1. This understanding can show you a different path forward. Knowing that your loved one's behaviors make sense to them can help you see what happens before they choose to use and while they are using. This can give you clues about what could happen instead. Can you think of any examples of how this could work?
2. Seeing what your loved one gets from using makes their behavior feel less random and more predictable, which can lower your fear and anxiety.
3. With this perspective, you can take the behavior less personally and feel more empathy toward your loved one. Truly understanding another person's reasons for doing anything helps us make fewer negative assumptions about them (which push us away). We feel closer to them and more willing to collaborate instead of trying to control them.
4. If you can talk with your loved one in a way that makes them feel understood, they will be more likely to talk to you and collaborate on a plan for change.
5. Last, this perspective on substance use goes a long way toward destigmatizing it. In a world in which substance use is considered a disease (sometimes helpful but often not accurate), a moral failure or weakness (never helpful), a "brain disease" (can make people feel hopeless and helpless), understanding the function of the substance use as serving a human need can reduce judgment and add compassion to a difficult situation.

Time to process: How have you understood your loved one's substance use in the past? How might the idea that behaviors make sense apply to understanding your loved one's choices?



A Self-Compassion Reminder

Since self-compassion is the fuel that will sustain you in your efforts to help, we invite you to ask yourself the following question:

① What is a kindness I can allow myself during this week?

This may look like a simple question, but it's often very hard for people in a helping role to allow themselves to ask or consider it. Please notice if you find yourself rushing past this question and try to stay with it a bit longer.

ACTIVITY #1

“It Makes Sense to Me!”

How do you think your loved one would answer the question: “What does substance use [or other compulsive behavior] do for me?”

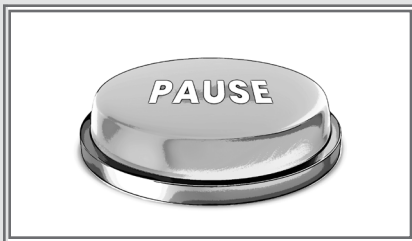
- Helps me feel less anxious
- Helps me feel less depressed
- Makes me feel good/happy
- Takes away the boredom
- Lessens my physical pain
- Makes me excited/inspired
- Helps me socialize
- Lets me feel part of something
- Helps me unwind after a brutal week
- Helps me focus and concentrate on important things
- Helps me lose weight
- Makes me funny
- Helps me appreciate others
- Lets me enjoy sex
- Helps me get to sleep
- Makes it easier to face the day
- Other:



If you put them in order, which do you think are your loved one's top three reasons for using alcohol or drugs (or other compulsive behavior)?

1. 2. 3.

PAUSE BUTTON



We will talk more about pausing in the next section, on **Helping with Awareness**, but thought this tool may be useful to you now as you take in these new ideas for **Helping with Understanding**. For now, let's take a brief moment to "hit the pause button" by checking in with ourselves on how we are feeling.

Do you notice any uncomfortable or upsetting feelings as you consider the reasons why your loved one's behaviors make sense? Maybe you found yourself thinking, "Why should I care what they get out of it?" It is normal to experience a variety of difficult emotions when you think about what might be reinforcing your loved one's behavior, because you are still left with all that you don't like about it. Our hope is that over time you can learn to focus on your loved one's reasons that make sense, even in the presence of your anger, distress, and other difficult emotions. Ultimately, effectively using your "pause button" can lead to opportunities for further discussion, connection, and change.

Extra credit! If you feel your relationship with your loved one is in a supportive or calm enough place, consider asking them about their reasons for using. Try to have your only agenda be letting them know you are curious about their reasons (or reinforcers) for using substances. This can be helpfully framed as "I am not wanting to suggest any plan of action or give any advice in this conversation, I just want to understand you better." If you decide to have this conversation, consider your mood and calmness beforehand, and plan to limit the length of time (10 minutes?) so that you don't tip over into feeling upset. We will share more **communication tools** later in this handbook.

ACTIVITY # 2

Understanding Behavior in Context

Understanding what a person gets out of using substances (or any other behavior) is crucial to helping them make changes. We can expand our understanding of their experience (and give ourselves more tools to help!) by looking at all the different parts of the behavior: the direct effect of their use and the things that happen before and after it.

Let's look at this situation:

Daniella has been a daily pot user for two years and is thinking about cutting back. Smoking has been causing problems at home with her parents; she has been feeling less motivated for projects and activities; and she doesn't like the anxious feeling she is starting to have after she smokes. But she also knows it gives her quick relief when she is anxious. It's just that later on she feels more depressed, tired, and winds up sleeping instead of doing school work.

This week she received some bad news about her school work: she did poorly on recent tests, which led to fights with her parents; she skipped a day at school which made things worse, and she has been feeling particularly sad and avoiding her family when at home. In the last argument with her mom, she was told to take the bus home from school, because she "did not deserve to be picked up."

She decided to walk home that day, a Friday, and took a shortcut through the park where her friends often hang out. She did then run into them, and they were smoking and offered her some. She initially wanted to say no but they looked like they were having fun, and she felt too tired and down to fight the temptation. She wound up smoking, feeling good for part of the night and enjoying being with her friends.

Based on this situation:

What events/emotions/thoughts can you identify that preceded the behavior of smoking?



What happened immediately after smoking that Daniella experienced as positive?

What might happen later that night or the next day that Daniella might experience as negative?

Based on this understanding of what happened before and after she smoked:

What might have helped Daniella decide not to smoke?

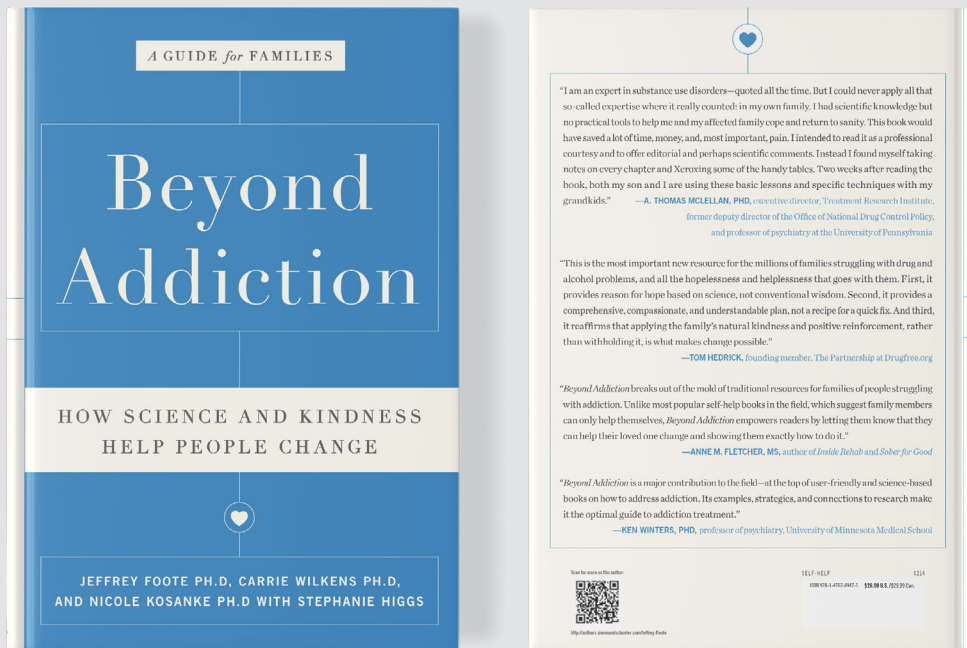
When you think about what she got out of smoking, are there things her friends or family could have done to help her not smoke? Are there things they could do to support alternatives to smoking given her stressors (i.e., the things that led up to the smoking)?

When you understand that **behaviors make sense**, you can see how you might be able to shift your loved one's environment to make the behavior less likely to happen, and to support other behaviors instead. We'll talk more about how this works in **Helping with Action**, but here you can start to see how understanding why a behavior makes sense is key to changing that behavior.

ACTIVITY #3

Putting Your Loved One’s Behavior in Context

Now let’s spend some time thinking about your loved one’s behaviors. In order to promote positive behaviors that can compete with your loved one’s use of substances, you’ll need to understand what is reinforcing their use. In this exercise, we ask you to brainstorm what your loved one may like about using substances. If this is distressing, bear in mind: their reasons for using substance are clues pointing towards how things can change. If you’re still not convinced of the value of this exercise, or you just need a break from it, you may want to read the chapter on motivation in our book, **Beyond Addiction**.



Flip the page to see the Activity.



STEP 1

List reasons why your loved one may be using substances. Start with reasons they have told you in the past ("It's fun," "everyone smokes pot," etc.) and also include reasons you believe from your own observations. Try to avoid blaming or accusatory reasons (e.g. "because he's an idiot," "because he doesn't care about anything," "he's trying to piss me off.")

Reasons for Use:

"Everyone else is smoking pot."

"I just need to chill out."

"I don't hurt as much and I can get some sleep."

STEP 2

Outline the basic needs that each reason in Step 1 fulfills. Below is a list of potential needs, and you can add others.

- Stress reduction
- Enjoyment
- Mood stabilizing
- Rebellion
- Pain Reduction
- Anxiety relief
- Helps sleep
- Risk taking or thrill
- Social interaction

Basic Needs Being Met:

Social comfort, maybe anxiety relief.

Stress reduction.

Pain relief, helps manage emotions.

STEP 3

Once you have identified underlying reasons why your loved one might be using substances, brainstorm alternative ways you could help them address that issue.

Alternatives:

Talk to a doctor about anxiety; help expose him to new groups of friends.

Give time to unwind after work without having to jump into taking care of the kids.

Get medication consult. Join support group for people with pain to get validation and other ideas to cope.

TRY THINKING ABOUT YOUR LOVED ONE'S REASONS

STEP 1

Reasons for Use:

STEP 2

Basic Needs Being Met:

STEP 3

Alternatives:



Resources

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE INVITATION TO CHANGE

BOOK

“The Beyond Addiction Workbook for Family and Friends: Evidence-Based Skills to Help a Loved One Make Positive Change - Dr. Jeffrey Foote, Dr. Ken Carpenter & Dr. Carrie Wilkens.” Available August 2022. **LINK: BeyondAddictionWorkbook.com**

HOMEPAGE

Learn about our mission and ways to support our cause:

LINK:

cmcffc.org

SCAN:



TRAININGS

Learn about upcoming ITC trainings and events:

LINK:

[cmcffc.org/
trainings-hub](http://cmcffc.org/trainings-hub)

SCAN:



GROUPS

Want to start an Invitation to Change group in your community?

CMC: Foundation for Change is committed to supporting grassroots access to evidence-based ideas and practices; and we wholeheartedly encourage readers to support each other through the Invitation to Change process. For more resources to help you use this handbook in a group setting, please visit our website at cmcffc.org/groups.

ACCESS THE LATEST ●
RESOURCE DIRECTORY ○

LINK:

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