

The 5 Ways to Talk with a Loved One About Addiction



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It's not easy to confront someone regarding their addiction. Here are some pointers...

1

Focus on your positive intentions throughout the conversation.

When involved in intense conversations, we often become angry or fearful, and that can confuse our motives in the conversation. Before we realize it, we begin to focus on proving that we're right, on winning the argument, or on keeping the peace rather than healthy problem-solving. Before talking with your loved one about addiction, pause for a moment to ask the focusing question: "What do I really want to accomplish?" Taking this pause can help you remember your positive intentions throughout the conversation and avoid pitfalls like trying to win or just keep peace, leading to a more fruitful encounter.

If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.

—Proverbs 18:13



These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another; render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace.

—Zechariah 8:16

2

Confront with facts, not accusations.

By presenting facts, you obligate your loved one to respond to the information. But when you use accusatory language or judgements, they're likely to feel you're intending to humiliate or punish them, and they'll feel no obligation to engage in the conversation. As an example, if you're speaking with a teenager, you could replace, "You're a liar, and I won't stand for this," with "I've noticed the spray cans of air freshener I bought for the bathrooms are already empty. I only bought them a week ago, and your dad and I haven't used much of it ourselves. As far as I know, you are the only other person who has been at home."



3

Help them feel safe.

It is likely that your loved one may become defensive during these vital conversations less due to *what* you're saying than because of *why* they think you're saying it - their assumptions about your intentions.

Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

—Romans 13:10

Know this, my
beloved brothers:
let every person
be quick to hear,
slow to speak,
slow to anger.

James 1:9

Help them feel safe (continued):

Here are three steps to help them feel safe in the conversation:

a) State what you don't intend and what you do intend: "I want to reassure you that I have no desire to make your decisions for you, or to cut you off from having a happy life. I want to be supportive of you, and I want to influence choices you might make that I believe will hurt you."

b) Be flexible about *when you talk*, but not about *whether you talk*. Control is a huge issue. Sometimes you can provoke an unnecessary confrontation by demanding that conversations be on your terms and your timeframe. It's best to try to engage in dialogue by respecting the other person's preferences about when to talk. "I'd like to talk openly with you about your concerns and mine. I'm interested in hearing your views even if we disagree. Is now a good time to do that or would it be better later? And if later, when would be good for you?" If they don't want to talk now, show respect by being flexible—within reason.

Help them feel safe (continued):

If your loved one doesn't want to talk at all, help him or her understand why talking is required. "I understand that you don't want to talk right now. I also know that you intend to go to a party tonight where I have reason to believe there might be bad influences. If we can't talk before then, I'll need to decide how to deal with the party tonight on my own. If we can talk before then, it will give me a chance to hear your point of view. What would you prefer we do?"

c) Create a "safety reserve" by creating safety even when there are no problems. Communicating respect, praising small positive signs, "catching" them when they're being good, and showing an interest in the person's life will help him or her feel much safer talking to you when problems emerge.





Gently instruct those who oppose the truth. Perhaps God will change those people's hearts, and they will learn the truth.

— 2 Timothy 2:25

4

Agree on boundaries.

If you discuss and agree on rules and expectations before he or she is tempted to make bad choices, it is much easier to enforce them later. Then, if boundaries are violated, keep them accountable—consistently. Something established as a boundary should always be a boundary.



5

Afterwards, assess the conversation.

Your goal is a two-way, face-to-face conversation that allows your loved one space to disagree with you and communicate their point-of-view, even if it differs significantly from yours. After the conversation, ask yourself: “who did the most talking,” and “did I follow the 5 Ways in this document?” If your loved one didn’t do at least 25% of the talking, you asked too few questions—or didn’t help them feel safe enough to participate fully.

*Source: Joseph Grenny, author of the New York Times bestseller **Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High***

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